



# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

How effectively do public and third sector organisations encourage and engage with children and young people to participate in decision making processes affecting their lives?

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my most beloved mother, Mary Casey, who in supporting me throughout my life, sadly died just prior to my submitting this thesis for the PhD assessment process.

My mother taught me to love regardless and to show compassion always. She believed in my capabilities and was always a source of constant encouragement for which I am eternally grateful.

# ABSTRACT

What rights do children and young people have to participate in the decisions that affect their lives? And what benefit, if any, can be gained from their participation in the democratic process?

This research seeks to explore the national policy agenda that emerged under New Labour's 'Third Way' discourse for greater young citizen participation, which has seen a significant drive for more 'listening, participation, empowerment, user involvement, consultation and inclusion' (Willow, 2002, p. 31). It will look at how the 'rights of the child', as expressed in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) has formed a growing realisation that children and young people are both a distinct and an integral part of this policy initiative for greater participation.

Through the adoption of an interpretative perspective the research will undertake a case study exploration of these issues directly with child and young people across a number of public and third sector organisational settings, utilising a Participatory Action Research methodology (in the form of an Interactive Group Work Programme) in order to examine their engagement in decisions that affect their lives. The research will also examine the factors that both inhibit and promote participation with young citizens and how this is effected by the individual organisation's context and practice. It will also explore through the proposition of a new paradigm shift in the 'adulthood' (Bell, 1995) discourse that identifies an '*awkwardness*' in the way adults engage with children and young people arising from a lack (and/or loss) of the skills necessary to respect, relate and respond appropriately to them. A shift that I have termed the '*Three R's of Awkwardness - Respect, Relate and Respond*'.

Central to the design of the methodology developed for this research is its expression of an ontological belief that children and young people have a capacity and capability, which offers a unique and powerful resource at the participatory table. In line with this belief, the research identifies a new distinction between forms of communication which are 'instructive' and those which are 'expressive' in nature and benefit participatory dialogue. In so doing, it has demonstrated the aim of this research in seeking to express the importance of this participation agenda and the value that can be gained through it.



# **DECLARATION**

I declare that the work in this doctoral thesis is all my own work, except where otherwise indicated. It has not been previously submitted to any other university or institution of a higher education, in total or in part for the award of degree.

In the interest of confidentiality, all the case study data used throughout the thesis have been anonymised with the use of acronyms and a colour coded key to identify each of the case study organisations. All reference to individuals, whether adults or children and young people have also been anonymised either by their job title or by a short descriptor.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Acronyms

BYC	British Youth Council
CC	Children's Centre
CCM	Children's Centre Manager
CYP	Children and Young People
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfES	Department for Education and Schools
EBF	Even Better If
ECM	Every Child Matters
ESRC	Economic Social Research Council
GALRO	Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officer
IGS	Independent Girl's School
IGWP	Interactive Group Work Programme
INLOGOV	Institute of Local Government Studies
LA	Local Authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LAC	Looked After Children
LAC/RoC	Looked After Children/Rights for Children
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MMYG	Male Muslim Youth Group
NNEB	National Nursery Education Board
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research

PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic
RC	Roman Catholic
RoC	Rights for Children
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
SSCC	Sure Start Children's Centre
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WWW	What Went Well
WWW	World Wide Web
YGM	Youth Group Member

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“The children rights movement may be seen as a positive sign, a sign of progress rather than evidence of the decline of childhood” (Foley, Roche and Tucker, 2001, p.5).*

### 1.1 Introduction - Finding the Focus of the Study

My doctoral research journey began at the University of Birmingham's Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), with an initial keenness to investigate citizen participation in general as a result of the, then, New Labour government's pledge to have 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', as set out in a Local Government White Paper published in October 2006. The influence of this White Paper resulted in the 'Sustainable Communities Act 2007' (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous> (June 2010) and received royal assent on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2007. At its heart, the Act had the aim of changing the way communities are governed. It set out New Labour's commitment to empower local citizens to be involved and to participate in the public sector reform agenda. The principle objectives were to create better communities through new relationships, and better governance by promoting a more responsive service as well as by empowering citizens, which in turn formed a new duty to 'involve and to ensure that citizens play an active role' (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous> (June 2010). Under these provisions, the duty to engage citizens rested with Local Authorities who were required to ensure that local people had a greater opportunity to be involved and to influence decisions. The New Labour

government believed that there was growing evidence that involving citizens in local decision making processes and service provisions would create a number of benefits, which included some of the following:

- Strengthening the democratic legitimacy of government and the civic life of the community
- More efficient and effective services that better reflect the needs of users and have higher levels of customer satisfaction
- Safer communities and a more attractive built environment that meets people's needs
- Strengthening community cohesion

When the Sustainable Communities Act (2007) was passed, there were already a range of existing statutory requirements to inform and consult with or promote participation of users or citizens in relation to individual functions, such as with town planning issues. The concept of 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', however, placed participation within a wholly new contextual dimension, such as that adults, through local representation, were now given greater influence over the following areas of decision making:

- **influence or direct participation in decision making** (for example, in helping to shape local priorities via citizen panels, service advisory panels, neighbourhood management, participatory budgeting, citizen juries)
- **provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes** (for example, 'have your say' section on the Local Authority websites,

service-user forums, petitions, and feedback forms being made available)

- **co-design/work with the authority in designing policies and services** (for example, being involved in the commissioning of services)
- **co-produce/carry out some aspects of services for themselves** (for example, having responsibility for the maintenance of a community centre, the transfer of the management of assets, communities taking part in 'street clean up' or environmental conservation work),
- **work with the authority in assessing services** (for example, citizens acting as mystery shoppers, user evaluators and as co-opted members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees) (<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net> June 2010).

Although, this legislation did not explicitly include the role of young citizens, I was aware, through my own professional involvement, at that time, as a Sure Start Children's Centre Manager responsible for implementing associated initiatives, that there was an implied inclusion, acknowledging the fact that children and young people form a significant part of the overall social populace. Because of my professional commitment to advancing children and young people's well-being and status within society, I was firmly of the belief that they should be included and provided with an equally comprehensive framework to foster their co-participation and engagement. It was, therefore, as a result of this lack of clarity and explicit reference to children and young people in the Sustainable Communities Act (2007) that my particular interest in this field of study was roused. As a consequence, I was keen to investigate the extent to which the



New Labour government's agenda, at that time, had specifically applied to young citizens, and to what extent these directives had been adopted by public and third sector organisations. My aim was therefore to determine and evaluate both:

1. The potential that young citizens have to participate in decisions affecting their lives, and
2. To investigate the degree of encouragement and involvement that has been extended to them as well as the factors that inhibit or undermine their involvement.

In order to conduct this examination, I have focused my study on exploring how public and third sector organisations have provided a platform through which children and young people can actively participate in the organisation's decisions, assessing how children and young people themselves view their own experiences of participation, evaluating their ability to contribute to the processes of participation and also the ability of the adults that they encounter and interact with to open their practice to become more participatory. This examination will be undertaken within 4 case study public and third sector organisational setting including an initial in depth pilot (public sector) study, which will utilise the medium of a participatory action research methodology (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) in order to enable me to work directly with children and young people.

In reflecting these specific goals, I framed the following central research question:

**“How effectively do public and third sector organisations encourage and engage with children and young people to participate in the decision making processes affecting their lives?”**

In addition to exploring this primary research question, I have also identified the following subsidiary research aims and corresponding questions:

**Aim 1.** To explore the benefits, if any, for children and young people's participation within the case study settings.

**Question:** "What are the benefits within the case study organisations from children and young people's participation in decision making processes?"

**Aim 2.** To assess the influencing factors which enable children and young people to participate in decision making processes.

**Question:** "How do different organisational and engagement factors influence the extent of the children and young people's participation in decisions within the different case study settings?"

**Aim 3.** To understand the perceptions that children and young people have about how adults treat them when they are involved in the participation processes.

**Question:** "What are children and young people's perceptions of how they are treated by adults when involved in participation processes?"

**Aim 4.** To examine the capabilities that children and young people have to enable them to participate effectively in decision making processes.

**Question:** "What abilities and competencies do children and young people have to enable them to actively participate in the case study settings?"

## 1.2 Ontological Perspective

As part of the process of my reflection and initial exploration into this area of research, I affirmed my own ontological perspective base that placed a value on the importance of advancing young citizen's inclusion and equality in New Labour's participatory agenda. As part of this ontological perspective, I am in support of the paradigm which holds that children and young people are capable of articulating their opinions, drawing on their own particular perspectives and diverse backgrounds, so as to express appropriate ideas and inputs, which are meaningful, and can contribute, in a unique and positive manner, in decisions that affect their lives. In addition, I believe that children and young people have a desire to be involved in these processes, which is in part supported by their own growing awareness of participatory rights.

Whilst, such involvement is undoubtedly partly influenced by issues of maturation, age, race, class, ability, gender, family structure, culture and sexual orientation, it is nevertheless, these factors that offer an intrinsic diversity and inherent vitality which, I believe, is material and can benefit society in general and children and young people in particular, both in terms of the services they receive and in the personal development that might result from participation. Such a vision, I feel, gives hope to the possibility of an untapped resource waiting to be utilised, that could realistically help transform many of the structures that exist in our society today. It might also have the potential, in time, to mark a radical shift in our educational, social and the political systems and landscape, which would further strengthen democratic principles.

Interestingly, the new Coalition Government has already indicated that citizen involvement and participation is a key area for expansion and progression. The current Prime Minister, David Cameron, has advocated a need to build a 'stronger, bigger and a more responsible society' (Cameron, 20/07/2010). Cameron goes on to say that he wants to bring about one of the biggest and most dramatic redistributions of power through a range of measures, including by means of the 'National Citizen Service'. This particular agenda, is aimed specifically at young people to help build and strengthen 'social responsibility' in order to 'inspire a whole new generation of young people to appreciate what they can achieve' (Cameron, 20/07/2010).

### **1.3 Influences on this Investigation**

Coupled with my ontological perspective, I was also conscious of the many influences arising from my own previous and current professional experiences. These include working directly with children and young people, beginning with a strong focus on child observational techniques (which I learned as an NNEB trained nursery nurse) through to my role as a Guardian Ad Litum Reporting Officer (GALRO) manager, and my more recent role as head of a Children's Centre, which made me very aware of the importance of including investigation studies that directly involve children and young people as an intrinsic part of the research. In particular, at an early stage in this study, I felt that the focus of my research should centre on how a range of different case study organisations provided young citizens with opportunities to have their say and get involved in activities over and above simply 'being informed and consulted' (Hart, 1992).

In addition, due to the developing impact of the rights of children and young people, as promoted in Article 12 of the United Nation's Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), which particularly draws attention to the rights that children have to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions which affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account (Willow, 2002), I was keen to investigate how the case study organisations provided motivation, scope and consideration for young citizens to participate in decisions as an integral part of the organisation's function, and to see how they viewed the outcomes, if any, from their engagement. Consequently, this study has been designed in order to undertake an innovative programme of Participatory Action Research (PAR) which involves the following core elements:

1. An Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP) directly with young citizens who are aged between 11 to 16 years
2. An empirical research component in the form of a small sample adult questionnaire
3. A semi-structured interview component with key adult representatives to broaden the qualitative interpretative nature of the investigation
4. To provide each of the case study organisations with an outcome report which can be used for further action (see Appendix 5 – Pilot Study Head teacher's Report)

#### **1.4 A Developing Agenda**

During the course of this study, the former New Labour government's agenda for citizen participation in public services at neighbourhood level was further

advanced. Communities and local citizen engagement took on a new direction in order to 'give local people and communities more influence and power to improve their lives' (<http://www.communities.gov.uk> October 2008). This agenda endeavoured to help build public trust by strengthening civil society, so that a greater response could be given to 'citizens' expectations, that their voices be heard and their views be considered' (OECD, 2001a, p.11). This derived from the view that there needs to be more 'listening, participation, empowerment, user involvement, consultation and inclusion' (Willow, 2002, p.31), and was echoed in the introduction of the White Paper on 'Communities in Control' (DCLG, 2008), which stated that 'people no longer accept the 'one size fits all' service model of old. They want choices over the services they receive, influence over who provides them and higher service standards' (DCLG, 2008).

Whilst again, this document did not specifically address the direct inclusion of young citizens, the issue of 'public trust' was an important development. This issue ought equally to be directed very specifically, in my view, at young citizens, who should be included in these considerations, which seek to encourage everyone to engage and participate effectively in decisions that affect them. Accordingly, in each of the case studies (including the pilot study) I directed my examination at how young citizens view their participation in relation to a number of specific contexts that related to their community settings and leisure/social environments. Furthermore, I looked at the question of value, examining the uniqueness derived from the child and young person's perspective and how this can add to the improvements being sought in service delivery, which was then fed back into each of the case study organisations through the reflective report

following the fieldwork investigation completion. This was particularly important, since young citizens are beginning to be recognised as key players in contributing their views on how services should be developed and delivered. Finally, I also examined as part of the factors affecting participation, the actions, attitudes, values and skills that adults have in their response to the participation development agenda.

### **1.5 Concluding Comments**

It is clear today; with the new Coalition government's own particular orchestration of the notion of citizenship, in the form of the 'Big Society', that the principles underpinning the drive towards greater citizen participation across the political divide is likely to continue to develop into the future. Creating opportunities for children and young people to participate in influencing decisions that affect their lives is fast becoming an essential requirement for meeting the growing awareness of their basic civil rights, as first expressed in the rights of young citizens detailed in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989).

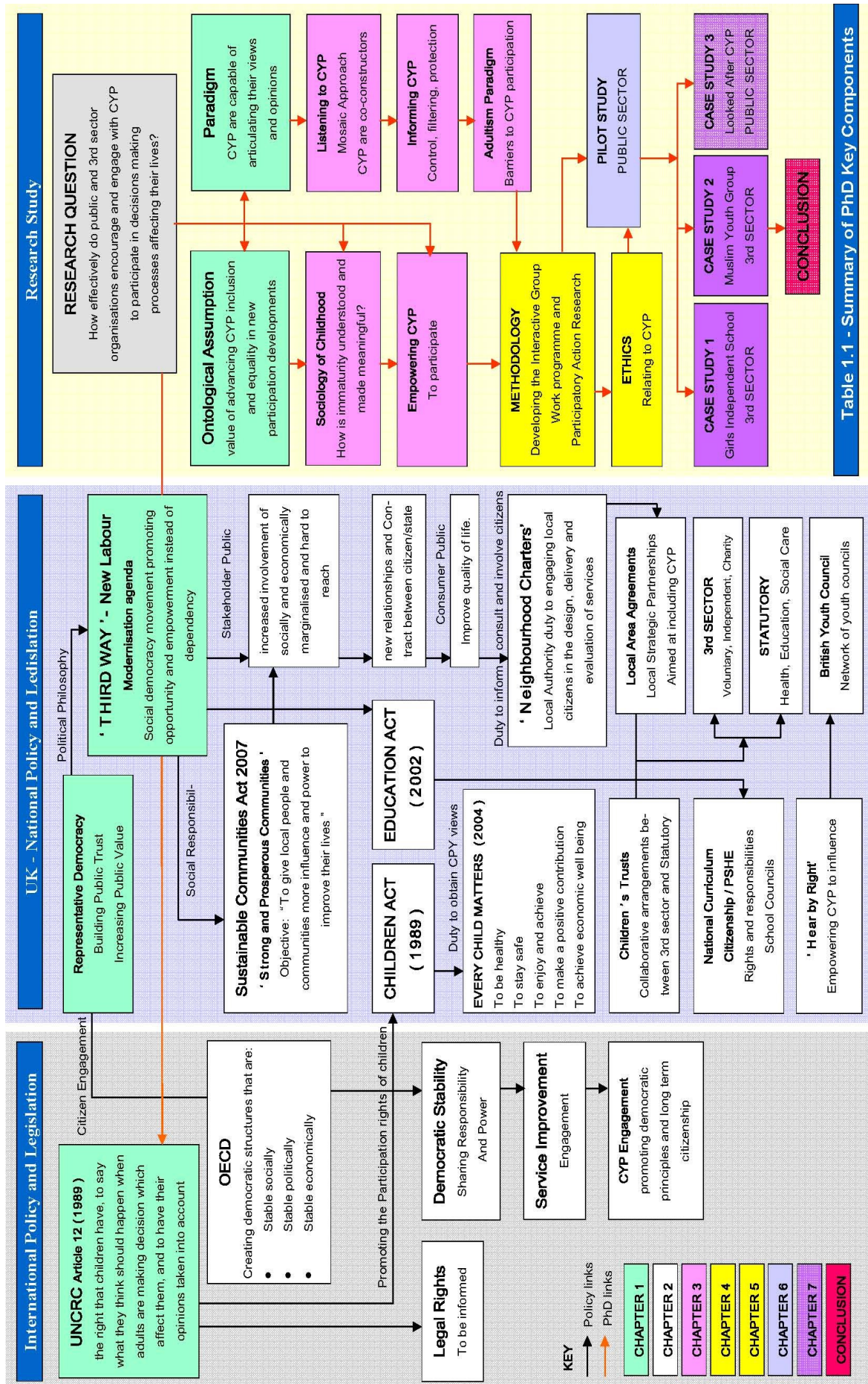
Although the Coalition Government has placed greater prominence on the role young people play in the structures of society, which in light of the August 2011 UK riots has been accentuated, particularly in regard to civic answerability, the initiation of my study first began in the time of New Labour, whose more general emphasis was on participation, citizenship, involvement in decisions and civic responsibility. Therefore, my focus has been on the consideration of the extent to which this thrust for citizen involvement relates distinctively to young citizens. The direction of my thesis took shape at the time New Labour's policy agenda

was being defined and actualised. As a consequence, this research looks specifically at how organisations have responded, deliberated over and developed the inclusion of children and young people's engagement through participation in their decision making processes.

This brief introduction has set out the principle factors that formed the focus of my study, which together with my ontological values and assumptions, and my paradigmatic belief in the capacity of children and young people to be a constant surprise, despite the fact that we (as adults) have all lived through a period of childhood. In undertaking this research exploration, I am indebted and fortunate to have been able to share this journey with my two Doctoral Supervisors who, to a great extent, share my enthusiasm and belief in this area of investigation, and who supported me in expanding the research endeavours into other participatory domains.

In order to assist more fully an understanding of how this research study has been set out, I have devised the following diagram to provide a summary of the key components of the investigation. This summary diagram shows the interlocking elements, which forms the nature, scope and philosophical basis of the research as well as the theoretical framework and the guiding principles for undertaking the fieldwork study. In the next chapter, I will expand upon the various policies that have influenced the participatory agenda as well as in reviewing the key literature sources.





## CHAPTER 2

### POLICY LITERATURE REVIEW

*"UK policy, unlike in many other European countries, most often focuses on children when parental responsibility fails. The assumption underpinning social policy is that unless their welfare is threatened, children are primarily the responsibility of their parents." (Utleby <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>, 30/1/1998 accessed 1/7/2010).*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 explores the various national and international policy initiatives that have formed the basis for advancing greater citizen participation generally and more specifically those elements which have led to the growing realisation that these developments should involve adult and young citizens together by right. In doing this, it provides an overview of the policy perspective that comes predominantly from the New Labour government. It will draw out the key elements of the 'third way', alongside which it will also briefly acknowledge the emerging ideas of the newly elected coalition government. In addition, it will examine the encouragement of citizen fulfilment and service efficiency through a range of policy initiatives between those who deliver services, whether in the public or third sector agencies and those who use them or are affected by them. What is evident is that there has been a mixture of policy developments over the past 20 years in advancing public accountability (Foley, Roche & Tucker. 2001) through user empowerment. What I am particularly concerned with in this chapter is to examine the extent to which these key policy initiatives form a backdrop for citizenship in respect to children and young people.

## **2.2 A Developing Policy towards Participation**

The United Kingdom's (UK) governmental guidance has increasingly encouraged young citizens to take their place at the 'decision making table' (Willow, 2002) with a view to promoting effective participation. There have been, in recent years, signs that the UK government was being modernised to make way for young citizens to play a real active part in decisions, which is valued and given credibility. New legislation has brought about changes which have been enormously important to progress the participation agenda; for example, the Children's Act 1989 and 2004. This is evidence of the global commitment from which the government has pledged to make all laws, policies and practices fully compatible with the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989, Willow, 2002, Marshal & Parvis, 2004).

This global perspective is seen as a key element in the pursuit of economic stability and growth, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has placed democratisation high up on its priorities. Central to its philosophy is the view that democratic social structures tend towards greater social and political stability and are inherently able to connect to established economic structures that co-exist within well-established democratic nation states. Relevant to this consideration is the awareness that, at a local level, the rights agenda more generally has brought about its own need to challenge democratic influence in the delivery of services, the importance of being able to be more representative and to structure local services to better meet the needs of local citizens. Thus, the OECD (2005) promulgates the importance of fostering greater local democratisation, with a view specifically to

encouraging and engaging all sectors of society, including children and young people to participate in the decision making process. It is hoped that this, in turn, can ensure that citizens experience the democratic process within the many interlinked social, cultural and political contexts of their lives, and that local citizens can have a true voice that influences the way services are developed, commissioned and delivered. In this way, the democratic principle will continue to infiltrate from the macro global context to the micro local context and this will aid the political growth of the democratic voice, with local citizens being encouraged and empowered to participate.

In relation to consultation and participation the distinct policy division, however, between children and young people and their adult counterparts has not been recognised until recently. Within the context of establishing forums for the citizens' voice, it has become apparent that the New Labour government had pushed its policy agenda to include provision which also promotes listening to the voices of the young citizen. As this recognition emerged through the policy agenda, particularly in the educational system with the development of 'pupil voice' and school councils, there has been a realisation that in fact the need to focus on developing democratic involvement of children and young people is fundamental. Moreover, this was seen by New Labour as creating the potential for long term citizen engagement. Consequently, according to Roche (1999, in Hartas, 2008), the way in which the citizenship involvement paradigm has filtered down to consider young citizens' participatory rights has largely been influenced by an educational school-related outlook, since this is where young people spend a considerable amount of their time. This has been given added legitimacy as

there is a growing acknowledgement in both New Labour and in the current Coalition government of the importance given to encouraging young people to:

- Become more active participants in their education, including evaluation of their own learning
- Participate in creating, building and improving services to make them more responsive to their needs and those of the wider community
- Make a difference in their schools, neighbourhoods and communities
- Contribute to a cohesive community
- Learn from an early age to balance their rights as individuals with their responsibilities as citizens
- Develop, through the way they are involved, the knowledge, understanding and skills that they will need in adult life (Hartas, 2008, p. 95).

New Labour's policy push at the time was founded on the doctrine of the 'modernisation' (Dean, 2002, p. 17) agenda relating to citizens' rights in an attempt to open up accountability, which was concerned with the positive rights of the citizen to be involved in local public service decisions. Working from this premise of accountability, I am of the view that children and young people, as young citizens, should have the right to be integrated more readily in the discourses on participatory perspectives, in order to remove the divide between what are seen as adult or child participatory rights. If, as I believe, young citizens can bring a new perspective that is unique by virtue of their age, position within society and natural vitality to generate a new meaningful dimension to the whole process of democratic decision making, it is essential that social policy legitimises the value of this resource by ensuring that due regard is paid to the issues of accountability and clarity between them and their adult counterparts.

### **2.3 International Democracy and Participation - OECD**

New and active public participation has an international context and is seen as one of the main aims of governments around the world according to the OECD, who believe that governments are in a crisis of identity (OECD, 2005), with many governments having poor election turnouts and with widespread feelings of disenchantment among citizens (OECD, 2005) in the democratic process. This has led to an erosion of public confidence in governance as a process of 'representative democracy' (OECD, 2001a, p.3). The notion of public participation as 'government-citizen relations' (OECD, 2001a, p.8) has developed more swiftly. There has emerged a conceptual approach of citizens-centred partnership, with the authority of the state to 'compel individuals to contribute directly to the achievement of public objectives' (Moore, 1995, p.29), so that, for example, every citizen is 'made to feel the weight of the obligation to pay taxes to help the society achieve its collective goals' (Moore, 1995, p. 29).

Accordingly, it is from this perspective that governments are now facing up to the challenge, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of introducing new ways to strengthen their relationship with citizens and to formalise new avenues of citizenship and participation through active engagement, consultation and information processes. The need to strengthen a 'government-citizen relation' (OECD, 2001a, p.8) is based upon the concept of supporting and complementing the institutions in civil society through which democratic processes can be enhanced. Within this need, the importance of unambiguous leadership, which is transparent, is recognised so as to ensure that individual rights are protected in governmental operations. This is, however, often greeted with indignation by the public because experience

reveals that public institutions and government can rarely create 'public value' (Moore, 1995). Nevertheless, citizens and institutions in civil society want demonstrably good governance that allows for greater public participation in shaping services and policy development. It is hoped that this will in turn, in due course, 'build public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity' (OECD, 2001b, p.11).

The active involvement of young citizens is perceived by the OECD as a sound investment in the core elements of good governance, which is an essential organic instrument that can help bridge the gap between the adult citizen voters (who have in recent years become arguably disillusioned in the democratic process leading to poor turn-out and voter apathy) and the up and coming future voter population of the next generation. The OECD also sees this aspect of sound investment leading to an improved quality of life, an increase in security and ultimately increased economic prosperity. It is hoped, that the involvement of young citizens, in activities which provides sufficient time to develop purposeful skills for active engagement, will 'buck' the trend in the adult citizen voter, as the new generation begin to demonstrate active engagement through voter choice and participation.

## **2.4 Public Participation**

According to Creighton (2005), public participation can be defined as the process by which 'public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into the governmental and corporate decision making' (p.7) process. With the heavy influence of the OECD, citizenship through public participation was seen by New

Labour as a 'legitimate goal' (Maitles, 2005 p. 1) in order to 'create strong attractive and thriving communities and neighbourhoods' (<http://en.www.communities.gov.uk> October 2008). By these means, Local Authorities could form new partnership arrangements with providers of service and those who use them with central government providing the guidance as a national blueprint for coordinating mechanisms for joined-up working at regional, sub-regional and local levels. Philosophically, New Labour believed that political devolution was important for keeping community representation at the lowest possible geographical level, 'consistent with efficiency, justice and the political objectives of Local Authorities' (Burgess, et. al. 2001, p.63).

This concept, under New Labour, gave rise to the advancement of a framework for the way government engages with its citizens on a number of levels, from consultation on policy-making to direct active involvement in the decision making process for the way services were run and delivered. This influence provided a way of putting the citizen at the centre of development by encouraging beneficiary preferences to be determined through involvement in the interventions that affect them over which they previously had 'limited control or influence' (Cooke & Kothari, 2002 p. 5).

The emphasis on greater public participation has high aspirations (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007, p. 1), and is pointed to by Mulgan (2005, p.2 in Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007, p.1) when he confirmed that 'public participation could radically improve our quality of life'. From my experience, as a Sure Start Children's Centre (SSCC) manager involved in partnership enterprises



that included service providers and users working together, I believe, this view is correct. Public participation can contribute to creating more active citizens; help manage complex problems in public service design and delivery, as well as to help build new relationships and shifts of power resources for 21<sup>st</sup> century governance, alongside developing individuals' skills, confidence, ambition and vision. These objectives gave rise to the formulation of the 'rational-choice' (Scharpf, 2006, p. 8) notion of 'letting-go', which became a key policy initiative for the New Labour government for building on what had been achieved and in rebalancing the connection between central and local government, and the relationship with the citizen through participatory involvement.

Within the broad objectives of participatory contribution there is also, according to Cook and Kothari (2002), an important drive to increase the involvement of 'socially and economically marginalised people' (p. 5). The down side to this is that conversely, it can give rise to the prospect of, and justification for, getting 'quick wins' to provide initial impetus for 'sustainability, relevance and empowerment' (Cooke & Kothari, 2002 p. 5). Clearly, there is always the danger that such factors could be hijacked as part of a government's political rhetoric in order to support its own legitimacy (at both central and local government levels), whilst potentially cloaking an unjust and illegitimate exercise of power (Cooke & Kothari, 2002).

Public/citizen participatory process does not happen accidentally or coincidentally (Creighton, 2005). Adoption of the discourse requires extra effort, expenditure and resources as well as demonstrable active participation, and consultation

processes on behalf of organisations in both the public and private sector fields. Consequently, where it has been adopted purely for tokenistic reasons, without the appropriate resources it is not only likely to fail but may even undermine the perceived relevance of such an approach in helping citizens to improve their own quality of life. There is also the suggestion by some observers, such as Dean (2002) that social rights for improving the quality of the citizen's life are more about requiring citizens to participate and contribute to citizenship as a subtle transformation of welfare rights through a more consumer oriented form of rights within capitalist societies.

Notwithstanding these fears, participation in the democratic process remained one of the former New Labour government's devolved strategies, especially in regard to neighbourhood management and local governance, and was seen as a partnership between citizen and state. These perspectives continue to have implications for central and local government policy and practice (Burgess et al. 2001) as they provide unique opportunities for Local Authorities and their collaborative partners to actively engage with local citizens.

Thus, the prevailing influences of the participatory agenda has, it can be seen, its roots in the way New Labour delivered its modernisation strategy through the Modern Local Government (DETR, 1998) programme, which set the scene for what it called the 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1998 & 2000, Cogan & Derricott, 2000, Blair, 1998). This was based on the idea of a social democracy movement, a philosophy put forward by Giddens (2000) and seen as the renewal of social democracy, with a centre-left ambition for a new approach to leading. Powell

(1999, p. 13) indicates that the 'Third Way' is fundamentally about promoting opportunities and 'empowerment instead of dependence'. Allowing local citizens to act for themselves (<http://www.workinfo.Com/EconHist/thirdway.htm>, June 2008), through the vehicle of community empowerment, which is essential for government to work within a combined system of public and private provision. Indeed, it is a shift from the emphasis on social responsibilities through the free market, to a move which stresses social responsibilities by hard-working productive citizens. It also explored the importance of getting young citizens into good early habits of community engagement, which would instil a responsibility in later life for personal integrity, and a duty for citizen participation and community obligation.

New Labour's claim was that the 'Third Way' policies would lead to a 'new contract between citizen and state' (Powell & Hewitt, 2002, p. 2) as the driving force for public participation both in terms of the 'stakeholder public' and the 'consuming public' (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007, p. 21). In the longer term, this would be viewed as producing a range of important benefits for both the community and individuals, not least by creating a more joined-up mechanism for consultation and involvement in more and better integrated service provision.

## **2.5 Critics of the Participatory Discourse**

As already inferred, there are those who criticise the participatory discourse 'propaganda', notably, Driver and Martell (2007) and Cooke and Kothari (2002) in their edited book entitled *'Participation: the New Tyranny'*. Cooke and Kothari (2002) provide a set of rigorous and critical insights into the participatory

development discourse through a conceptual and ideological examination of 'theory, methods and practices' (Cooke & Kothari, 2002 p. 2), which challenge the participatory development orthodoxy - the notion that individual empowerment and opportunity is based on having a strong civic society that will ensure the rights and responsibilities of the citizen through democracy and which will enable the participants to have a bearing and relevance on the decisions being made. The task of political systems is to ensure that the knowledge of structures involving power dynamics and relationships is widespread in society. It could be argued, that this actually gives rise to the potential danger of persuasion by the political elite to further their goals with selected participants who can wisely interact with public affairs.

This particular danger is very prevalent in certain closed settings, such as schools, when considering how to ensure effective and inclusive participation by all young citizens regardless of their age, ability, gender, race or economic status. The risk that participants may be 'selected' is very relevant and could be a real danger (Cheminais, 2008, p.9). Consequently, the New Labour government sought to be more inclusive by imparting a greater rationality to neighbourhood regeneration through partnership initiatives such as Education Action Zones, Lifelong Learning Partnerships, and Excellence in the Cities (Burgess et al. 2001). Such initiatives propagate the way in which adults and children and young people are expected to respond to the developing agenda for participation. As a result a new pedagogy became evident within the school educational environment and within adult learning to promote self-directed learning so that participants constructed their own involvement, not only in their learning journey,

but also in taking responsibility for the decisions which shape their personal experiences.

Blair (1998) saw that the way to overcome these difficulties was in having robust and sound collaborative partnerships, creativity or innovation and most importantly the need for decentralisation. The revival of the 'Third Way' ideology appeared, at the time, to capture the imagination of the UK citizens when New Labour came into power, with its neo-liberal hegemony that distanced itself as an anti-ideological approach in favour of a particular discourse around the notion of modernisation, in order to provide a forum for collective social rights and activism.

The framing of the individual's right to participate is an important process, as both citizens and officials should be concerned with representation in identifying genuine allies for securing community driven objectives based on a wide level of activism. Such activism is not always possible or even practical. Therefore, the wisdom for all participant involvement is according to Cooke and Kothari (2002) characterised by a mildly humorous cynicism, with which they assert that some participatory processes undertaken ritualistically can actually turned out to be 'manipulative or which had in fact harmed those who were supposed to be empowered' (p.1).

## **2.6 International Policy - UNCRC**

The drive to advance public policy to include children and young people's participation has undoubtedly become a growing force in the UK following the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

in 1989, which, as we have seen, has had a wide influence internationally. The Convention is an international human right's treaty which recognises and protects the rights of children from birth up to the age of 18 years old, and up to 25 years for children with a special or additional need. A reading of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should make for optimism that participation is to be taken seriously both in legalisation and at a policy level within member states. The UK government formally ratified the 1989 UNCRC (Whitty & Wisby, 2007, Lansdown, 1995, Willow, 2002, Marshal & Parvis, 2004) in December 2001.

During the process leading up to the promulgation of this Convention there has been a shift in policy to recognise that young citizens have a right to basic standards; for example, the right to a name, a nationality and family ties and a right to have a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs (Articles 8 & 27). Alongside these, other rights have also been given prominence through the Convention, such as the right to freedom of expression - allowing young citizens to say what they think should happen and to be listened to and taken seriously (Article 12), a right to share information and freedom of expression (Article 13), a right to meet as a group and freedom of association (Article 15) and a right to privacy (Article 16) (Willow, 2002, Marshall and Parvis, 2004, Hartas, 2008).

As a result of these 'rights' there has been a significant growth in particular to the importance of 'listening' to a child's voices, which has sprung from Article 12 that articulates the rights of children to express their views. Article 12 states that:

1. State Parties shall ensure the child is capable of forming his or her own

views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Marshall & Parvis, 2004, p.380).

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (Lansdown, 1995, p. 2).

Article 12 clearly provides an obligation for a child's view to be an essential component in decision making process. It necessarily springs from this that such decisions should be in consultation with the child or young person. The acceptance of this right is a fundamental change in policy, especially since the Gillick judgement in 1986 (*Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA*, [1986] AC112).

There is, however, according to Lansdown (1995) a 'near universal acceptance of the importance of respect for children's rights' (p.1) although there is a debate about the willingness to make it explicitly an 'obligation to recognise and include children as members of society' (p. 7). Whilst this debate may still be inconclusive, there were a range of UK New Labour governmental policies which supported the move towards greater consultation with children and young people to include them in the participatory framework. This has been most evident in the way some initiatives have been implemented; for example, citizenship classes within a school setting in which pupils actively participate in the democratic process by electing members to a school's council. Consequently it is clear that

adults do have accountability for empowering young citizens to take responsibility for being involved, rather than only being passive recipients, as has often happened in the past. Equally, it is acknowledged by Calder (1995) that many professionals, whilst having a commitment to engaging with young citizens, find it difficult to translate into practice, particularly when it means relinquishing power and status (Calder, 1995, pp.749-66). There are also problems that can lie in the absence of or confusion about how the shared goal for joint working and active participation with young citizens can be achieved. This can be overlooked as so often, many adults may only see young citizens' contribution as a minor one rather than as a deeper pool of resource.

The Convention nevertheless, establishes a unique challenge to the traditional assumptions about the status of children and young people in wider society. Clearly, the UNCRC is a document which is widely respected by politicians and policy-makers and has resulted in significant increases in public expenditure according to Burke (2010b), particularly following the ratification of the Convention in 1991 into UK Law. There is little doubt that the UNCRC has played a pivotal role in defining the international consensus on what underpins the core principles of a comprehensive system of support for engaging with children and young people. The support mechanisms that have emerged in the UK echoes the stress laid on the need for wholehearted commitment from each agency, its workers and its resources that are essential to facilitate a culture which demonstrates an effective working relationship in giving attention to the basic requirements of 'written information, practical arrangements and emotional support' (Foley, Roche & Tucker, 2001, p. 252).



## 2.7 National Policy for Children and Young People

In seeking to deploy the principles and standards of the Convention to expand the framework for developing policy and practice, New Labour brought forward a key policy provision in the form of the 'Children Act 1989'. This set out a right for children and young people to be taken seriously when adults are making decisions which affect their lives, and that their wishes and feelings should be taken into account. Willow (2002) is of the view that the Children Act 1989 is often credited with 'single-handedly promoting the participation rights of children' (p.16).

Despite the new and developing orthodoxy for active collaboration with young citizens, the place of children and young people today in society remains in many ways contradictory. On the one hand, adults are encouraged to treat children and young people as individuals capable of self-directed action, whilst at the same time there are persuasive influences for more surveillance, supervision and regulation of children and young people. The idea that children are active agents, affecting as well as being affected by the world around them, in which their participation and voice is important, is still in many ways a wholly new approach. It is, therefore, encouraging seeing the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, drawing attention to the influence that children have had on his thinking. In one instance, he revealed that a letter from a Belfast child had strengthened his determination to pursue a peace initiative in Northern Ireland (Utley, <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/1998> accessed July 2010).

Still, the policy debate in this country is often couched in terms of welfare at the

household level and tends to downplay the perspective of children themselves. Dr Prout, a leading academic, says:

"UK policy, unlike in many other European countries, most often focuses on children when parental responsibility fails. The assumption underpinning social policy is that unless their welfare is threatened, children are primarily the responsibility of their parents." (Utlley <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>, 1998 accessed July 2010).

The tragic death of Victoria Climbiè and the subsequent Lord Laming Inquiry (Laming, 2003), did however, caused a significant change in this trend, albeit with there still being an emphasis on safeguarding. As a result, important amendments to the Children Act were made in 2004, which changed the way Local Authorities should protect children and led to new principle outcomes for ensuring that '*Every Child Matters*' (ECM): Change for Children, which created a new approach for improving the well-being of all children and young people from birth to the age of 19 years, or up to 25 years for children and young people with special and additional needs. Within this framework the five main aims, which the government wants for all children and young people as part of their long term vision for each child regardless of their background, are:

- To be healthy
- To be safe
- To enjoy and achieve
- To make a positive contribution
- To achieve economic well-being (Burke, 2010b).

These five outcomes have been supported by a wide range of organisational reforms, intended to bring about early intervention, universal service provision,

and service integration (Kirtton, 2009). This policy shift and the participation agenda provided a wholesale commitment to children and young people's rights and established a ten year change programme to bring about improvements in the outcomes for children and young people. Accordingly, local organisations are expected to work together in order to take into account the views of children and young people in designing and delivering their services. The requirement is now for all organisations to work together, to share information and protect children and young people in achieving these five core aims. Children and young people are expected to have a fuller involvement, far more say about the issues that affect them both as individuals and collectively within the ECM framework and supported by the underline principles of the Children's Trust. To this end, all Local Authorities have applied the UNCRC as part of a framework for all services for young citizens.

As Local Authorities move to provide modes of support, they are required to provide children and young people with a clear understanding of what is on offer and what is expected of them. Accordingly, Local Authorities are required to give an expression on the limits of influence children and young people can be expected to have in so far as they are called upon to contribute to the decision-making process. Similarly, clear methods need to be formulated to enable a consultation process with children and young people that take account of their differences and levels of maturity. It is recognised that these differences demand a distinction from the forms of consultation processes that would be carried out with adults. Arising from this agenda has been the development of the 'Hear by Right' programme that focuses on empowering children and young people to

influence provision to help drive up the quality of services and to ensure that local barriers to access are identified and addressed.

The levels of participation practice in the 'Hear by Right' require transparency to enable children and young people to feel that they are being taken seriously and that their views really do matter and do have an impact on the way services are being run and delivered. To achieve the aims of the 'Hear by Right' participation agenda, there are the following set of standards; known as the Seven S's <http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>, 2008) which provide a self-assessment tool kit:

1. Strategy
2. Structure
3. Systems
4. Staff
5. Skills and knowledge
6. Style of leadership
7. Shared values

Local Authority organisations are challenged to develop creative methods of working with children and young people to meet these standards, for example; through the use of video, drama, dance, music, arts, crafts, photography and interactive sessions. Adopting a creative approach to the process of consulting with children and young people is aimed at enabling the young citizen to explore, amongst other things, difficult and sensitive issues such as experiences of bullying or the effects of peer pressure. The use of creative methods of engagement provides a participatory platform that are particularly effective in connecting with 'hard to reach' groups such as youth offenders, children in secure homes, disabled or special needs and black and ethnic minority groups. The

added value of using creative approaches to participation is that children and young people are able to learn new skills, be able to express themselves as well as learning to communicate and negotiate better. The challenge to adults engaging in any form of creative participatory method or technique is that it necessarily demands new skills, approaches and attitudes on their part.

## **2.8 Strong and Prosperous Communities**

The 'Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper' (DCLG, 2006) was introduced to build on New Labour's 'Third Way', by proposing new approaches to collaborative partnership arrangements. This led to an explosion of different types of participation methods, initiatives and programmes such as Sure Start, Extending Schools, citizens juries, user groups, parent forums, neighbourhood committees, children and young people councils and parliaments to name but a few. Whatever the particular method, their purpose is primarily to ensure that Local Authorities lead the way in working with others to engage citizens so as to better meet the needs of local people. This tripartite approach has been established in order to break the trend that sees a lack of engagement with the democratic process occurring, particularly with young citizens. It is also hoped that this policy will reverse the view that, according to Maitles (2005, p. 3), young people are 'apathetic, alienated and uninterested' in politics.

Empowering local citizens and communities to have a bigger say in the services they receive by means of a public participation process feeding into legitimate local democratic processes, is not only a way of engendering active involvement

but also of strengthening those processes themselves. It is evident, that the agenda for meeting this accords with the idea of creating 'new relationships with local government based on a mature conversation about what is best for local people' (DCLG, 2006 p. 3). In this process, citizens are at the heart of democracy as the system of government rests upon the consent of the people and the 'relationship between politics and strategy' (Foucault, 1996 p. 203). Part of achieving this consent is not only through the principles of democratic government but also by the different forms of representation and types of public participation in the decision making processes for shaping public body services. Hence, 'politics' in this sense means, according to Weber (1919, p. 1), to 'strive to share power' or to 'strive to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state'.

The promise of this perspective is alluring, as it gives rise to the notion that power is free flowing and forthcoming. That is not to say, that freedom and power in society has not been around for decades, rather, the emphasis on a different orientation for increasing the opportunities for citizens to be involved in, and take ownership of local facilities and assets and to determine how things are run and delivered, was given particular prominence by New Labour. The emphasis for integrated collaborative partnerships, which include the involvement of citizens, has an implicit assumption that 'democratic-welfare-capitalism' (Dean, 2002, p.38) is being encouraged through the policy agenda and that this should not only involve the rich and powerful but also the economically weak, including the young citizen.

Young citizens of today, as represented by the present generation of pupils within the educational system, are according to Fortin (2009, in Invernizzi & Williams, 2009) much more aware of their own important status as right holders. This reality has partly come about as a result of every Key Stage 3 pupil undertaking an introduction to citizenship education studies, which is meant to generate a longer term impact on a child's own ideas so that they 'understand, at a basic level, their legal rights and responsibilities ... with particular reference to the UNCRC' (Invernizzi & Williams, 2009, p. 55), as well as appreciating such rights and responsibilities as factors for strengthening a democratic society (Fortin, in Invernizzi & Williams, 2009).

Today, the new Coalition government's 'Big Society' agenda is, in many respects, not dissimilar to New Labour's vision for empowering communities to be more challenging of Local Authorities and providers of services. The challenges that faced New Labour and now face the new Coalition government rest, to a large extent, on having local representation from all sectors, with robust arrangements for communities to participate and be involved.

For these authority-led initiatives to work, it is understood that, there is a need to ensure that there is in operation the establishment of parish councils with good systems for demonstrating local democracy. Similarly, civil society organisations, whether public body or third sector, also need to be proactive and help lead the agenda for proper representation, particularly in youth provision, so as to show not only a shift away from direct management by public and third sector bodies but a shift towards demonstrating the direct impact on the service users. As a

result of this shift, it is believed that one positive outcome, derived from utilising the tacit knowledge base of local representatives within local communities, will be to facilitate expedient decisions. Such an achievement may also be dependent upon there being a good infrastructure in place to support the necessary transfer of power. Equally, it is recognised that there may be a requirement for simultaneous funding arrangements to be put in place to help the capacity building of local representatives and to enable them to meet, record and communicate their decisions. What would appear to be essential for these new arrangements, under the 'Big Society' agenda, is that they offer legitimate opportunities for practical engagement of young citizens in decision making. These prospects offer eager anticipation to the drive to include children and young people in the process and should be met with enthusiasm by adults in both public and third sector organisations.

## **2.9 Neighbourhood Charters**

During New Labour's period of government, however, the demands to strengthen democratic goals saw the creation of 'neighbourhood charters', which were developed as a way of making the decision-making process more amenable to public influence. It provided information on the names and contact details of local service providers, eligibility for the service being provided, as well as when and where it was available. Accordingly, it was hoped that it would provide a platform for stimulating democratic renewal at grass-roots through the community centred neighbourhood-based approach. To achieve this, participating Local Authorities were required to spell out its particular standards and commitments to the service being provided in terms of both quantity and quality and to indicate timelines for



the services, which local citizens were entitled to have. It also sought to stipulate the rights of the user together with their responsibilities. In addition, a clear complaints procedure was also required to be set in place giving some indication of what redress to expect if the services failed to deliver what citizens expected. 'Neighbourhood charters' became an important way for Local Authorities to meet their new duty to inform, consult and involve citizens.

### **2.10 Local Area Agreements and Children's Trusts**

Under New Labour, the emergence of Children's Trusts were seen as a means of addressing issues within a new process of bringing together all of the provision in both statutory and third sector organisations that deliver services to children and young people. Children's Trusts are 'unincorporated associations' (Audit Commission, 2008) for key agencies involved in delivering public services. They advise and influence local action in respect of the way children's services are commissioned and delivered. Children's Trusts are underpinned by the Children Act 2004, which followed the publication of the Laming Report (2003) on the death of Victoria Climbiè, recommended more integrated services for children and young people as well as including a 'duty to cooperate'. This new duty is required to help focus all agencies on improving the lives for all children and young people. How this looks at grassroots level will vary depending on the identified needs of the communities being served. The key components of the Children's Trusts embody the following set of core principles:

- Integrated governance and accountability
- Integrated strategy such as a single children and young people's plan
- Joint commission of services and the pooling of resources

- Integrated processes for information sharing and a common assessment mechanism
- Integrated frontline delivery with skilled teams of professionals working jointly together (Audit Commission, 2008).

In essence, the key aspect of Children's Trusts is to develop sustainability through governance, accountability and collaborative arrangements. Children's Trusts should centre, therefore, on meeting the needs of each child within a Local Authority catchment area.

The importance of a community-led approach, working to create 'thriving, vibrant sustainable community' (<http://www.communitie.gov.uk/communities/sustainable/>, May 2008), was seen as a means of improving everyone's quality of life. Since it is clear that this policy was founded on the belief that the state has, as is asserted by Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007, p. 21), a large role to play in the creation of active citizens. Local people and key stakeholders have therefore been encouraged to participate in the decision making process through 'capacity building, community planning and devolved forms of local government' (Burgess et al, 2001, p. vii). In light of these policy objectives for sustainable community strategies, aimed at 'giving local people and communities more influence and power to improve their lives' (<http://www.communitie.gov.uk/communities/sustainable/>, May 2008), it was necessary for Local Authorities to begin to address the methods needed to create citizen's active engagement.

One of the key ways of achieving this was through the development of 'Local Area Agreements' (LAA), which alongside the emerging Children's Trust arrangements, contain the main priorities and local targets for children and young

people's services, that were agreed by members of the collaborative partnership within a three year action plan that is based on a longer-term sustainable future for the community. This action plan is subject to agreement by the 'Local Strategic Partnerships' (LSP) who bring together key organisations and agencies to identify the needs of local communities and the major priorities in children and young people's services. Such arrangements should engage local citizens, as participation is further built into the services affecting children and young people in an active and collaborative partnership way with the aim of addressing and achieving local improvements. To this end, it is seen that local children and young people can influence the decision making process and take action to help improve their neighbourhood.

At its heart, the aim of including young citizens has three essential core purposes: to enhance reform, to empower and to access and ensure quality (<http://www.nya.org.uk>, Accessed December 2007). To achieve these goals, Local Authorities are required to lead on seeking to improve how society views children and young people. In so doing, it is hoped that Local Authorities and their collaborative partner agencies will demonstrate trust in children and young people to help make decisions about the services that affect them.

### **2.11 National Curriculum on Citizenship**

In order to promote the concept of 'citizenship' New Labour introduced Citizenship, in 2002, as an important part of educational development for young people and it now forms part of the National Curriculum. The aim of the citizenship programme within a school setting is to enable pupils to learn about

their rights and responsibilities and to understand how society works. In this way, its objective is to equip children and young people with a greater understanding and knowledge of social and political matters so that they can deal with all the challenges that they are likely to face as they develop into young adults.

Along with citizenship, a Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) programme has also become a statutory part of the National Curriculum. A successful PSHE and citizenship programme is seen as a means of empowering children and young people and to help raise self-esteem, build confidence and increase motivation for learning on a range of issues faced by children and young people as they grow up. The types of issues that are covered include the following:

- Drugs and alcohol education
- Emotional health and well-being
- Sex and relationships
- Nutrition and physical activity
- Personal finance
- Safety
- Careers education
- Work-related learning (<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk>, August 2010)

As part of these objectives, the Citizenship programme sets out a benchmark for pupils to learn about themselves as developing individuals and as members of their communities (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk> August 2010). Within this agenda there is an attempt, through statutory guidance and legislation, to help pupils learn more about their and other people's feelings and show they can take some responsibility for themselves and become aware of the views, needs and

rights of other children and adults. It should therefore, assist children and young people to recognise the choices they make and to understand how rules help them to work cooperatively with others in an endeavour to facilitating a realisation that everyone, including other living things, have needs, and that they themselves also have a responsibility to meet those needs. Accordingly, children and young people are encouraged to join in simple class debates on topical issues affecting them in their lives and to listen to other people; such as visiting community representatives. These exercises are intended to encourage children and young people to respect differences, aid them to express themselves, to share their views, to have a voice and to help make a difference to the community life of the school in which they operate.

## **2.12 Public and Third Sector Response**

In response to the New Labour government's encouragement for young citizens to play an active part in the decision making process and to be empowered to be able to sit down at the decision-making table as equal and valid partners, radical proactive approach by public and third sector organisations has emerged. Some organisations, such as The Children's Society, have for example, created new inclusive approaches to their recruitment processes by including children and young people as panel members on interviews for the appointment of staff. They have also introduced opportunity to be directly involved in decision on how to spend an allocation of budget on equipment exclusively for the benefit of the children or young people themselves.

The concept of a 'youth voice' that articulates these changes remains a shared

vision of the current Coalition government. The British Youth Council (BYC) has, for example, as a key agency, been given the lead by the Department for Education to capture this voice and enthusiasm as part of a new national 'Youth Voice' service, springing from the 'Positive for Youth' strategy (Participation Work, August 2011).

As a consequence, the BYC, as a youth-governed charity, has helped embed children and young people's participation in public life as a norm within the structure of public and third sector organisations across a network of 450 youth councils, the young mayor's network projects and the UK Youth Parliament's new work (Participation Work, August 2011). The BYC believe that the best way to achieve participating young citizens in active decision-making is by providing forums whereby young people lead and shape the dialogue in partnership with decision-makers at a local level, with the intention that greater support is given to young people to participate in decision-making both locally and nationally through the support of the UK Youth Parliament. In the BYC press release, Children and Families' Minister, Tim Loughton said, "As part of our Positive for Youth strategy, we want more young people to get involved with local decision making, helping to shape the services that affect them. Whether it is through youth mayors, local youth councils or the UK Youth Parliament, every local authority should be actively seeking and listening to the views of young people" (Participation Work, August 2011). Liam Preston, Chair of BYC, commented that "this is a great opportunity for young people to deliver an agenda that is positively youth led". The BYC will be inviting young people to get involved both in representing their local communities and in representing the views of their peers in local and

national decision-making forums.

What really excites me about this initiative is the potential for young people to get greater recognition from the general public, not only for their terrific talent and achievements, but also recognition for those taking on a leadership role in communities. This is an opportunity for young people themselves to be positive for youth and for us to foster young leaders to take forward that agenda to decision makers, to the communities and to the public' (<http://www.byc.org.uk>, September 2011).

What is evident from these developments and commitments is that there is an advancing opportunity for children and young people to start to formulate and deliver on an agenda which is positively youth led. Equally, within these goals, there appears to be a real funding commitment from the Coalition government to support young citizens to take on these active participation roles and to support the forums being created.

### **2.13 Concluding Comments**

In this chapter, I have mapped the way in which the policy discourse for public participation has evolved through international agencies, which have sought to promote better democratic processes in member states, to its application and articulation within the public policy agenda in the UK that emerged predominately under the direction of the New Labour government. I have discussed the key influences of the OECD and the UNCRC 1989, which has dominated this discourse, especially in respect of children and young people, leading to new UK

policy and legislation aimed at incorporating and taking into account both these important directives so as to help strengthen self-governing processes and as a means of providing a platform for young citizen's participation in decisions.

In addition, I have highlighted the public policy agenda for participation in decisions that are the result of the agenda to build strong and prosperous communities. In so doing, I have set out how the development of Neighbourhood Charters, LAA, Children's Trusts and Local Strategic Partnership arrangements have fitted into the National Curriculum programme on citizenship to influence the democratisation of children and young people, aimed at helping them become aware of their rights and responsibilities, not only for themselves, but also for others. Within this context, the important role of public and third sector organisations in embracing the participation agenda is drawn out in order that young citizens are included as autonomous decision-makers in local communities. This is especially relevant today, as the incorporation of children and young people has been given a boost in recent months by the new Coalition government who have provided funding to the BYC to engage the 'youth voice' at both national and local levels.

In the next chapter, I will explore the body of theoretical approaches, understanding, research and concepts that underpin and affect (in both co-operative and obstructive ways) the participation agenda that specifically relates to children and young people. For example, whilst the policy review has helped contextualise the developing participation agenda, the literature review will explore how these objectives have at times also suffered from various forms of resistance, which according to Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007, p.31)



effectively limits any momentous exchange between the public and third sector bodies and relevant government departments which 'ultimately prevents any wholesale transformation of local outcome' (p. 31).

## CHAPTER 3

### PARTICIPATION LITERATURE REVIEW

*“I’m smart, you’re dumb, I’m big, you’re little, I’m right you’re wrong” Roald Dahl - Matilda (1988).*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the first sections of this chapter, I will chronicle my research journey drawing out the influences that a number of key conferences have had on my field of research, and how these have helped me focus my literature review and formed a philosophical perspective that framed my research aims.

In this light, I will address the conceptual framework for developing citizen participation for children and young people, which is multi-layered and needs to be defined in order to draw out the various dimensions that frame it. From the policy review it is clear that there are different drivers for children and young people’s participation, and as yet there is no definitive definition or consensus about what it really means in practice. Consequently, the meaning of the concept emerges from the discourse between those shaping that practice and is influenced by whether they come from a school of thought based on positivist or interpretative paradigms (May, 2002).

There is therefore a need to critically present the way in which the current literature regards the idea of children and young people’s participation through the citizenship agenda, whilst also exploring the unresolved tensions and critical issues that exist in the literature. Fundamental to this research is an investigation

of the ‘mechanics’ of participation, including the various principles, models and techniques, which make for effective communication, as well as the barriers and values that are an obstacle to it, leading to my own initial interpretation that identifies a form of ‘awkwardness’ in the way in which adults engage with children and young people.

### **3.2 Rationale for Framing Children and Young People’s Participation**

At the time that I started this study, as outlined in Chapter 1, my initial impetus came from the wider adult citizen’s participation agenda through the Sustainable Communities Act (2007). Initially, I looked at Barnes, Newman & Sullivan’s (2007) work, who aptly note the substantial issues relating to aspirations for enhancing public participation and Creighton (2005) who discusses the democratic process around participation and how it has evolved over time, ending in some practical suggestions on how to improve participation within democratic societies. I also reviewed the work of Giddings (1982, 2000, and 2002) who comments extensively on the ‘Third Way’ and New Labour’s decisive and persuasive commitment to the renewal of social democracy, as well as the OECD (2001a, 2001b, 2005) publication with their drive towards greater representative democracy and globalisation gains that flow from citizen participation through active community involvement.

In April 2008, shortly after I had commenced my doctoral programme, I was directed by the University’s research community to a conference, which specifically addressed the growing commitment to young citizens’ participation within public and third sector organisations. Held in Leicester, the conference was

run by the National Youth Agency (<http://www.nyas.net>, 2008) and provided a focus on young people's involvement entitled '*listening and responding to children and young people*'. This conference helped me gain a greater insight into the two national frameworks - Every Child Matters: Change for Children (DfES, 2004) and Youth Matters (DfES, 2006) whose policy directives were orientated towards increasing young citizen's participation as a democratic voice within public and third sector organisations. The primary aim of the conference was to alert delegates to the participatory agenda so that they could consider whether their organisation had the necessary structures in place and a sufficiently skilled staff team that was capable of providing the strategic direction needed to engage actively and successfully with young citizens in decision making processes.

Through my links with a learning community; the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), I further examined issues concerning the rights of children and young people and the responsibilities of governments to comply with the UNCRC (1989). During the following eight month period I attended a number of further conferences and training events run by the Participation Works (<http://www.participationworks.org.uk> 2008) organisation which focused on: 'Children's Rights in Action', 'Ready, Steady, Change', 'EurOpinions: Citizens Forum for Young People' and 'Hear by Right – building standards for the active involvement of children and young people'. These events helped form a deeper understanding of the policy agenda promoted by New Labour and provided examples of creative methods used to engage with children and young people. The information detailed in these events also illustrated ways in which participation by young citizens had been able to effect change in various areas of

their lives. At the national conference, run by the 'NHS – Involve: Supporting Public Involvement in the NHS (2008)', I was able to examine a range of research methods centred on children and young people within a health care environment. Whilst this event was informative, it was clear that the threshold for acquiring permission to undertake direct research with children and young people within health care settings would be too onerous and complex and would adsorb an inordinate amount of time in seeking the required ethical agreements.

Following these experiences, I considered Bennett's (1976) concepts on the characteristics of progressive and traditional teachers and the typology of teaching styles to help pupils' progress. Supporting this work was also a body of literature that promoted the concept of 'pupil/student voice' (Cheminais, 2008, Cruddas, 2012, Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011, Fielding 2005, 2008, 2009 & 2011, Rudduck and Flutter, 2004, Thomson 2011 and Wisby, 2011) in which the student voice discourse is viewed as the consultative wing of pupil participation.

At a further conference run by the BECERA (British Early Childhood Education Research Association) Professor Jean McNiff gave a presentation on Participatory Action Research (PAR). This introduced an interesting and practical way of undertaking research with children and young people that enabled the operating organisation to participate and learn in a continuous developmental form of practice as an integral part of the research process and subsequently influenced me greatly in developing my own research methodology.

Alongside these conference and training events, I sought to expand my

understanding of the conceptual and theoretical perspectives of childhood as future citizens from the rise in constructivist and interpretive theoretical positions amongst a number of leading academics and practitioners. In the following table, I have set out the main authors and provided a brief resume of each perspective and what I have gained from it.

**Table 3.1 – Table of Main Academic Perspectives and Critical Analysis**

Authors	Year	Perspectives	Critical/Analytical View
Clark, Kjørholt and Moss	2008	This work provides a combination of theory, practice and reflects on the meaning of listening.	The application of the pedagogy of listening opens up other constituents such as body language which must also be understood and is a clear dimension for children's voice and participation.
Foley, Roche and Tucker	2001	Within the critical insight provided the authors address the issues of 'problematizing' discourse of childhood concerning the adult listening agenda in respect of treating children more seriously across the varying social, legal, political and cultural contexts.	Changing children's services in favour of inclusion ultimately relates to empowerment and power sharing that can regurgitate adult type fears of distrust that undermine progress of listening and in allowing children's potential to be realised.
James and Prout	1997	This core and seminal discourse concerns the emerging paradigm of constructing and deconstructing childhood in a number of reflections on contemporary concerns on the way childhood is socially constructed.	Whilst it is evident that cultural ideas, philosophies, attitudes and practices have a significant impact on children and young people, the nature of childhood cannot be reduced to these factors alone. Such a view fails to acknowledge the role and impact that children themselves have in defining their own lives and social context.
James and James	2004	This examines social theories, social policy and empirical findings from case studies, which look at how cultural influences and the law work to construct childhood.	As a unique medium through which social realities are translated the 'law' (that is equally appreciated by children in their social constructs as an important 'minority group' (p67)) is intrinsically bound to issues of equality and inclusion and must therefore form part of the changes in culture and participatory experience/rights.
James, Jenks and Prout	2007	This work considers the link between contemporary sociological study of childhood and social theory within the historical and cultural dimensions of space and time.	The dynamic of 'time' affecting the notion of children seen as an adult in the making, and the cultural dimension of 'space' affects the reality of children as social actors and confronts the view of children as incomplete/incompetent.

Authors	Year	Perspectives	Critical/Analysis
Landsdown	1995	This work advocates the need to change law, policy and practice in order to realise the UNCRC's minimum standards.	Affirmation is given to the competency of children as legitimate actors capable of making decisions which is not a threat to the benevolent nature of families and parent's rights.
Lee	2003 2005	This work importantly examines the emerging conceptual framework of how children are viewed as 'incomplete beings' and are seen as 'human becomings'.	Within this concept there is an over dominance placed on children as social actors within an objective learning process associated with reasoning used to justify conclusions related to the adult world, which is an expression of the dominance of adult power.
Leira and Saraceno	2008	This edited work brings together the changing aspects of children in society across the international context.	The micro macro perspective of the human capital of childhood has its similarities internationally.
Qvortrup	1994	This looks at how children and young people are ignored and marginalised by more powerful adults in society.	Within this examination 4 distinctions are characterised which are only visible through genuine listening to children – and thus is a demand for inclusion.
Williams	2004	This work considers the social theories of childhood and the resurgent interest of children in society, and presents an alternative theoretical approach that reconceptualises the place of children in social structures which stresses the unique contribution that children and young people make to their own development and socialization.	The postmodernity drive now confronts the 'old' rational emphasis that modernity created with its focus on the mechanics of production to serve the social consumer. Consumer choice/ subjectivity now demands that the forces of production systems follow and no longer lead. Against this background children now have a growing voice in society.
Willow	2002	This work presents a number of case study examples from practical application perspectives in complying with the UNCRC (1989) agenda.	Balancing the competing rights of participation with protection is not a role for adults alone. The proactive inclusion of children demands a shift in adult thinking.
Wyness	2006	This work explores a variety of sociological approaches to research within childhood, which examines the role of children as competent social actors.	Postmodernity rejects the paradigm of children as passive recipients of processes of socialization. Instead, there is recognition of social competence and a rejection of the many areas that separate children and adults.

These studies led me to a further examination of the role of the United Nations and UNCRC (1989) as well as corresponding material centred on the children's participation agenda specifically, including the work undertaken by Hart (1992a, 1992, and 1997), and an article in the European Early Childhood Education Journal by Pascal and Bertram (Vol. 17, No 2, June, 2009) which concentrated on

an openness to how children might view their own experiences of participating in decision making processes. At the time, I recognised that this was an essential question to be investigated and should become a key component of my thesis. This in turn led me to research a body of work, predominantly from America, which introduced the concept of 'adulthood' (Bell, 1995 & 2009, Miller, Vandome and McBrewster, 2009, Sazama, 2009).

In further exploring these areas of study and investigation, I regularly presented some of my findings from the literature analysis at workshops run by the University's graduate school and within INLOGOV to explore a range of debates with fellow doctoral researchers and academics. At that time I enrolled in a summer school held at the University of Oslo, which looked at comparative social studies in relation to 'Childhood and Changing Context'. This provided a valuable opportunity to look at the work of Leira and Saraceno (2008) who were both, as eminent professors, involved in the summer school. The variety of workshops, presentations, group work activities and seminars introduced the concept of the homogenization (Frønes, 2005) and diversity of childhoods within a wider social context. It also explored a variety of structures and mechanisms which frame childhood as a cultural, economic and social condition in regards to rights and entitlements and the role and images which separate children from adults.

Following the completion of my pilot study, I was able to set out my analysis and initial findings at the EECERA (European Early Childhood Education Research Association) conference in September 2010. The feedback that I received was very positive, particularly with regard to the analysis that had led me to define



more specifically a form of communication that adults have with children and young people that could be characterised as either 'instructive' or 'expressive' in nature. A number of the delegates related their own anecdotal experiences associated with these ideas and expressed a willingness to use this concept to inform their own communication practices with young citizens.

As my research studies progressed, I recognised in myself a growing confidence, knowledge base and ability to be more discerning in assessing the material that I was examining. For example, I chose not to specifically consider the economics of children and young people in the work of Anker (2000) or the gendered citizenship discourse in Anneli et al. (2007). I also decided not to explore the role of young citizens within a global context outlined in Boyden (1997) or within family relationships, which for example, may have considered the role of grandparents through the work of Gauthier (2002) or Gillis's (2000) marginalization of fatherhood in western countries. I did however consider Lewis's (2007) concepts of listening and the power of the voice of the child as part of an investment in the child and as a social asset.

### **3.3 Theoretical Perspectives**

As the journey of exploration and enquiry continued, I was able to advance my own evaluative perspective on the nature, role and practice of young peoples' participation. In developing these thoughts, I was minded to agree with Lister (2008), who says that securing children and young peoples' participation within democratic participation domains across public and third sector organisations is

one of the critical developments of how 'society feels about the future' (in Leira & Saraceno, 2008, p. 383). The way children are reared is an indication of society's attitudes to the young and on how they should be educated. What seems to be evident is that the government according to Davison (2005), 'revert to a default position, thinking mainly about how children will fit in to the economy' (p.7). As was evident in the policy review chapter, this neo-liberal view of contemporary politicisation of childhood, which concerns economic growth and social justice, views children and young people as the primary focus for concurrently framing childhood as an investment in the future and as passive recipients in representative democracy. The many different forms of participatory discourse (Bennett, 1976, Barnes, Newman & Sullivan, 2007, Fielding, 2008, James & Prout, 1997, Lee, 2005, Willow, 2002, Wyness, 2006) however, provide good evidence for challenging the limited perspective of the neo-liberal stance, and for demonstrating that by nourishing participation activity children and young people's contribution can add value at the decision making table. Empowering children and young people to be stakeholders should therefore not be limited simply to future goals.

James and Prout's (1997) seminal framework, which studies childhood within a paradigm of social construction in Western socio-political context has had a critical influencing impact on the academic discourse in conceptualising the 'invention of childhood' (James and Prout, 1997, p. 2). Their writings balance the emphasis on biological growth of the child, brought forward from Jean Piaget's theory on cognitive development and the ideology of a child-centred society in relation to policy and practice in legal, welfare, medical and educational

establishments (p.1). The institution of childhood provides an explanatory frame for understanding early human life (James and Prout, 1997) in which child development has a particular structure, consisting of a series of predetermined stages which lead towards the eventual achievement of logical competence (p.11). As a consequence this analysis has had a powerful influence on the policy agenda for advancing social investment in childhood. Qvortrup (1997) points out, however, that this connection is not readily apparent when observing the absence of children and young people in official statistics and asserts that there is a marginalisation of young citizens, which results in excluding them unjustly (pp.78-98). This observation reveals, I believe, an oppressive characteristic in how adults often see children as immature and incompetent beings and conveys a lack of credibility in them as useful young citizens.

The importance of developing the theoretical perspectives in the current debate around childhood (James & James, 2004, James and Prout, 1997, Lee, 2005, Rudduck & Flutter, 2003, Wyness, 2006) and the role played by children and young people's participation (Cheminais, 2008, Fielding, 2011, Willow, 2002) in decisions, derive to a large extent from the political prominence given to young citizens and the role of co-production emerging from within the official discourse of agencies, policies and practices. It is these factors of organisational culture (surround co-production discourse, policies and practice) that may vary which can be said to be part of the social construction of childhood (James and Prout, 1997). As such, it provides according to James and Prout (1997), an interpretive structure for contextualising the early years of life. What is evident from the literature is that childhood is a social variable as it cannot be separated from

comparative cross-cultural analysis of young citizen's social relationships.

Consequently, there is clear evidence that the development of childhood importantly correlated with the adult world and that this relationship is critical to the promotion of meaningful and proactive participatory action with children and young people. To understand this further it is necessary to explore the role played by the paternalistic concept of 'adultism' (Bell, 1995, Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009, Sazama, 2009) which has its origins in the United States. According to Adam Fletcher (<http://www.freechild.org/adultism.htm>, October 2010) founder of *The Freechild Project*, adultism is the set of addictive attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and actions of adults towards children and young people. He goes on to suggest that adultism is a major concept in the organization of society as it prevails in every sector, including within government, education, social services and families.

What is clear is that no one specific policy directive, societal custom or cultural belief necessarily of itself can be identified as an instance of adultism, which has its origins in a body of literature and research on the effects of oppression and discrimination. Taken together, however, these influences leads, according to Lee (2005), to 'a gradual removal of children from mainstream society into spaces of preservation' (p.57). The concept of 'preservation' in these terms, as facilitated in the adult world, fails to fully recognise the childhood distinctiveness which gives 'voice' (Breslin, 2011, Fielding, 2008, 2011, Thomson, 2011, Wisby, 2011) to children and young people, particularly in 'citizenship-rich schools' (Breslin, 2011, p.58) and community outlets.

At its heart, adultism (Bell, 1995) centres on the conviction that adults can only see the world from their own particular outlook based on their capabilities and as such disrespect childhood because, for the most part, children and young people are 'considered less important than and inferior to adults' (p.1). This belief of childhood inferiority can be manifested by excessive nurturing, possessiveness or over-restrictiveness, all of which are consciously or unconsciously focused on excessive control (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009). This can result in adults not always acting in the best interests of children, which Lansdown (2001, in Foley, Roche and Tucker, 2001) asserts is an abuse of power. In discussing youth and cultural competence Velazquez & Garin-Jones (2012) proclaim that it is important to understand the tremendous power adults have over the lives of children and young people. The exertion of influence and authority regardless of the experiences, feelings and opinions of children and young people is a form of 'social control, which when coupled with the negative perceptions of young people that are prevalent in our society, leads to adultism' (p.2). The idea that children and young people's physical immaturity is a factor that determines their social identity has been embedded into our way of thinking in that it often assumes the status of fact (Wyness, 2006).

Whilst, I recognise many of the problems that Lee draws out in relation to the adult point of view, my own position is that today the influences of the more extreme notions of adultism is far less significant. Rather, there is, I feel, a more benevolent attitude towards children and young people which is genuinely empowering. Whilst this attitude is often swayed by the current cultural aversion to risk that can heighten the issues of protection and preservation it is,

nevertheless, generally in favour of co-operative and progressive action. Equally, James and Prout's (1997) new sociology of childhood with its focus on 'future citizen workers', fails to fully acknowledge, I believe, the value that children and young people have now by virtue of their youth. Consequently, these perspectives have influenced the way in which I have sought to formulate my research question and subsidiary aims, which have been framed so that they could include an exploration of these issues and factors. Central to this was the need to look more specifically at the following key processes and forms of interaction that exist between young citizens and adults and society:

- Are children and young people seen as an investment
- How is young citizenship developed
- What are the means of empowering children and young people
- How has pupil voice advanced participation
- What factors are involved in listening to children and young people
- Informing children and young people
- The concept of 'adultism'

### **3.4 Investing in Children and Young People**

Lewis (2007), believes that investment in children is an essential part of the social investment of the nation and is central to the growth of the modern welfare state, which relates directly to the child's 'future roles as an adult citizen' (Lewis, 2007, pp. 1-24). The process of creating new methods and means to enable children and young people to become authentic participants in the decisions affecting their

lives is made more complex because of the new paradigm in the sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1997, pp. 7 - 33). There is here a mismatch between theory and practice as much of this movement is related to the actual social relationships within which childhood and human life is constructed. What is pointed to, is the view that the 'immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture' (James and Prout, 1997, pp. 7 - 33). In general, most of the cultures in the developed world tend to see children as 'dependants, and are as such best served if they submit to adults' understanding of what's 'in their best interest' or for 'their own good' (James and Prout, 1997). This often leads to a protective exclusion of children and young people in real life situations as well as in social accounting (James and Prout, 1997). Parton and Wattam (1999, in Komulainen, 2007, p. 12) suggest that children's rights are actually eroded by adults who assume that children and young people lack cognitive, emotional and experiential competence to make decisions which reflect their best interest. In overriding these 'old' attitudes, the developing new sociology of childhood recognises that children are citizens in their own right, and are active subjects and experts in their own lives (Parton and Wattam 1999, in Komulainen, 2007, p. 12).

Indeed there is, in my view, a growing post-modern commercial recognition that children and young people are important consumers in an expanding marketplace and have an essential role in the participation and listening process that drives it. The challenge today is to create platforms from which young citizens can begin to develop a skill base that will benefit not only themselves but civil society as a whole. Platforms that recognises that children have a form of competence and

are capable of knowing how to articulate their preferences, desires and needs as well as being able to convey their views about what they believe to be in their best interest and those of others.

Concerns regarding issues of risk, ethics and pedagogy, within traditional participation settings, which have previously been limited to court proceedings, have had the tendency of polarising adult attitudes in a negative way but now appear to be giving way to a more respectful inclusion in such things as the citizenship agenda and development of school councils.

More and more, experience reveals that children are very capable of expressing their views, not least when they voice their feelings that they are not being listened to or taken seriously. Komulainen, (2007, p.12) calls this ability to express one's view as 'social competence'. What is needed therefore is a definitive drive to nurture children's ability to express their point of view openly and freely and to be empowered to do so. The following quotation, given by a 17 year old Malaysian delegate sitting on a United Nations Special Session for Children, illustrates the common feelings amongst young people about the lack of opportunity given to them in this respect:

“Adults miss the point. When is a child considered skilled enough to contribute and participate actively? If you do not give them the opportunity to participate they will not acquire the skills. Give us the chance early and see how we fly” (Bellamy, 2002, p.1).

This view, so poignantly articulated, makes clear that children and young people



want opportunities to be opened up to them. This desire obtained the highest support in the global decision making community when Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations, commented that adults need to be reminded of their obligation to elicit and consider the views of children and young people when decisions are being made that affect their lives (Bellamy, 2002). Part of this obligation, is the need for adults, to seek out proactively the perspectives and opinions of children and young people and to take them seriously. He goes on to comment that it is the responsibility of adults to help children and adolescents develop their competencies for authentic and meaningful participation. And in order to achieve this, he says, adults need to develop 'new competencies of their own and only if Governments fulfil their promise that the voice of children and young people will be heard loud and clear to ensure the full participation of children to build a better future' (Bellamy, 2002).

### **3.5 Pupil Voice**

The specific focus on the 'voice' of children is by no means a recent development. One of the key architects of what has now become the common concept of 'pupil voice', according to Michael Fielding (Fielding, 2005), was Alex Bloom, a head teacher at a UK state secondary school in 1945 to 1955. Alex Bloom was particularly concerned with how the process of undertaking formal education contributes to pupils flourishing as individuals. Fielding (2005) asserts that Bloom's approach to understanding pupil voice came from a 'dynamic vitality and principled integrity from accustomed dialogue between teachers and students and a cumulative acceptance of a shared responsibility for the quality and consistency of its practical consequences' (p.2). Alex Bloom's work is seen

as an important development in how formal education should be viewed as contributing to 'intergenerational learning as a central task of democracy as a way of life' (Fielding, 2011 p.1).

Within the UK democratic society the realm of engaging children and young people has changed to take account of what Alex Bloom had advocated and practiced. The concept of 'pupil voice' is now seen as embodied within a significant range of work under the broader heading of 'student voice' (Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011, Fielding, 2011), where pupils are expected to benefit both 'socially and academically' (Fielding, 2008, p. 9) from being listened to more collectively by their peers and adults through the teaching and learning process. The role of pupils is therefore seen to be elevated through for example, school councils where pupils are given responsibility for working alongside each other and their teachers so that a more productive learning community is formed.

In its broadest construction, student voice is the consultative wing of pupil participation within the school setting so that pupils have an opportunity to be actively involved in collaborative ways with peers and their teachers to aid learning through problem solving (Rudduck & Flutter, 2003). This has subsequently been reformulated towards recognising that student voice is, within the educationalist perspectives (Fielding, 2005), orientated towards a focus on children and young people's learnt experiences for 'person-centred education and democratic fellowship' (Fielding, 2011, p.1). Meaningful pupil involvement is therefore concerned with improving pupil's learning capabilities through seeking advice, inviting commentary about teaching and learning and to some extent

evaluative observations on the role of the teacher.

This way of recognising and harnessing children and young people's views by giving them voice through a process of engaging them as partners, fed into how New Labour considered the role of children and young people within representative social democracy, with a focus on advancing young citizens understanding and awareness of community driven initiatives within democratic society. That said, the rights perspective or discourse, which is promoted by advancing social justice within the social democratic agenda, can also directly confront the power dynamic that exists in the binary relationships between adults and children or the pupil and the teacher. Clearly, the ideology of the teaching environment is principally about providing a platform from which pupils not only learn but also become rational future adults within an inclusive rights perspective, which Fielding (2011) calls 'democratic fellowship' (p.2). Notwithstanding these issues, engaging pupils through active participation is seen as an essential part of the school curriculum so that the role of student voice is clearly present in the many different activities that exist in the community life of the school. Fielding (2011) stresses that pupil involvement fosters good leadership and school development and leads to 'intergenerational learning as a central motif of democracy as a way of life' (p.2).

The social construct of the school environment according to Cruddas (2012) is aimed at providing a controlled setting in which pupils are able to flourish through exploration and self-expression so that they can become rational adults of the future. The *in loco-parentis* nature of the pupil and teacher relationship within a

school model is imbued with social legitimacy. Arguably, this is the predominant view within the educationalist perspective, which has at its core the belief that participation is a form of 'benevolent paternalism, a tool to enable the child to progress toward rationality through self-expression' (Cruddas, 2012, p.3). This view does not see pupil participation as a force for social change because the relationship between pupil and teacher is regarded as essentially about a form of pastoral power (Foucault, 1980) leading towards the forming of children and young people as rational adults.

Lee (2005) supports this view by suggesting that there is a gradual recognition of pupil status as human beings within the educational system and as active learners. Within this philosophical perspective pupils are seen as 'active becomings' (p.77). As a result, this view fails to value the outcomes that may result from participation in decisions within the social construct. A more considered approach to the concept of student voice is therefore needed, since the notion of a pupil acting as rational 'becomings' denies the presence of intrinsic capabilities and competencies that otherwise supports inclusion and participation in decision making processes. As a consequence, the drive towards greater engagement opens up a more rudimentary recognition for change within the student and teacher relationship (Wisby, 2011 in Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011) which is not just about pupil's development of life skills, active citizenship and children and young people's rights but is about the initiation of 'shaping student voice around collaborative cultures' (p31).

There are, however, a number of identifiable problems within the context of

student voice, which (Thomson, 2011, pp. 22-24, in Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011) has recognised in relation to the following practical issues:

- **Singularity** – the term ‘voice’ is a unitary noun and implies that children’s ‘voices’ are viewed in the singular and not in the plural. Adults may believe that there would be a singular united voice within the social category of the children and young people’s group where differences are not recognised.
- **Purpose** – children are asked or choose to exercise ‘voice’ for different reasons but this ‘voice’ may be seen as having been ‘elicited for a single purpose’ (p.22). Adults need to be mindful of the different purposes and contexts of seeking children and young people’s voice, which will require and produce different kinds of responses.
- **Embodiment** – the concern here is that speech maybe privileged over other forms of bodily expression (p.23) through non-verbal forms of communication, which Thomson (2011) suggests can be either conscious or involuntary.
- **Authenticity** – ‘voice’ is understood by most adults as being a consistent and pure unadulterated truth or lie. In practice, this is not the case, as voice is not a one-off event nor should adults think that what is said is pure and correct. Bragg (2010, p.31) says that it is ‘naïve to think that children can be given or find their ‘voice’ as if it is a pathway to some kind of authentic core being’.
- **Language** – the idea that ‘voice’ is still seen as connected with language and speech. This can deflect attention away from the various forms of multi-media and genres of expression used by children and young people.

- **Etiquette** – there is a range of social rules or etiquette in which ‘voice’ is seen as being exercised in a particular way and at particular times in a conformist manner. The repercussion of this approach is that those children and young people who do not comply with the social rules are not regarded as exercising their right to speak appropriately, as they are not taking responsibility for their speech and action (p.24). As a result, this could lead to a ‘tokenistic’ approach, which Hart (1992) discusses as part of his ‘participation ladder’ and the equally interesting and useful ‘pathways to participation’ developed by Shier (Shier, 2001).

The difference between the pupil and the teacher is expressed well in these particular distinctions. They are helpful in challenging the dualistic relationship that operates in order to seek to redress some of the power imbalances that are inherent in the existing relationship where a genuine promotion of participation is sought. To this end, there are strong advocates, such as Flutter & Rudduck (2004), for promoting pupil inclusion so that they can bring to the participation process a contribution that can help strengthen a commitment to learning within the facets of school management structures; for example, in designing curriculum and evaluating teacher performance, representative councils and memberships on committees. This will, it is felt, move pupil involvement towards a democratic model, which according to Wisby (2011) will give rise to ‘teacher professionalism’ (p.31).

The fact that the voice of the child can stretch across a range of diverse areas has resulted in there being some disagreement about what student voice actually

means within the community life of the school. Fielding (2009) suggests that student voice is a 'portmanteau term' (Fielding, 2009, in Czerniawski and Kidd p.1) due to its diversity of practice and the commitment of learners and practitioners to the principles of social justice, democracy, active citizenry and children's rights (Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011). What is obvious today, I believe, is that the student voice agenda has been mainly re-invigorated and driven by the constraints of 'neo-liberal forms of global capitalism' (Fielding, 2011, p. 4). The emphasis on the neo-liberal perspectives gives rise to some anxieties concerning the element of control where it is 'driven by narrow adult purposes linked firmly to economic performance and the continued ascendancy of those in a position of power' (Fielding, 2011, p.5). Consequently, there is a need for caution in order to understand and balance the tensions and uncertainties that exist within the student voice movement.

Student voice can also be viewed in terms of obligation on the part of teachers in which it may be seen as a 'passing fashion' (Wisby, 2011, p. 35). A coherent rationale student voice agenda is therefore critical and should not be viewed as a short-sighted or tokenistic approach. Wisby (2011) also identifies the danger wherein some school leaders put in place quick win participatory activities to elicit student voice which can, in fact, be harmful as 'students will tire of invitations to express their view that they see as restricted or as merely paying lip-service to the idea of consultation or participation' (Thomson, in Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011, p. 35).

In order to avoid creating scepticism about democratic processes there is a need

to consider the relations that existing between the teacher and pupil in the many forms of participation processes. To this end, Hart (1992) has advanced a particular participatory ladder (1992) which characterises and defines certain levels of participation in which the voice of the student can be matched with varying degrees of participation practice and active outcomes (Figure 3.1below).

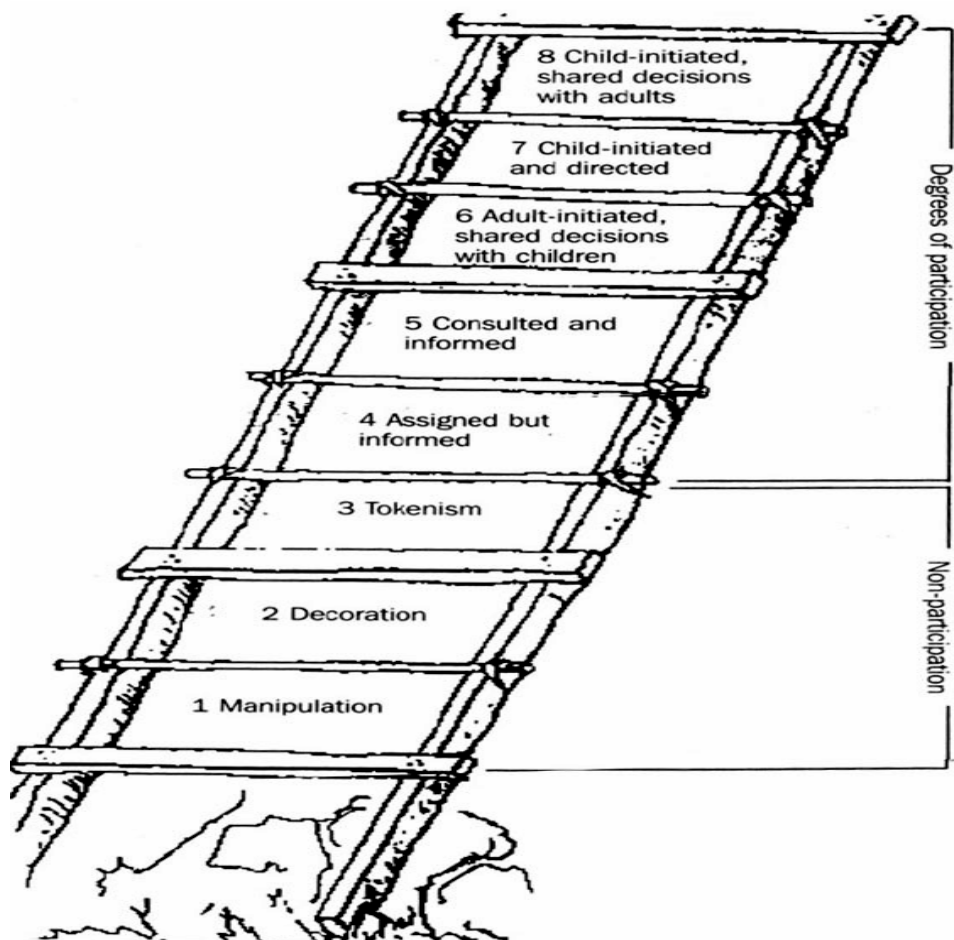


Figure 3.1 Hart's Participation Ladder (1992) borrowed from Sherry Arnstein (1969, in **Bovaird & Löffler, 2009**).

### 3.6 Developing Young Citizenship

Sitting alongside and supporting the pupil voice objectives has been the introduction of Citizenship within the National Curriculum. Learning about democracy and citizenship is now a key curriculum subject for pupils in both the



primary and secondary school educational system and is supported by a body of practice research evidence (Kerr et al. 2001, Steiner-Kharmsi et al. 2002). Kerr (2003) asserts that citizenship provides pupils with the knowledge base, skills and understanding to play an effective and active role in society. As a result, however, of its underlying political philosophical ideology, it is clear that the citizenship agenda in the educational curriculum, as well as seeking to promote participation in the micro context, is also concerned with the politicisation of young people to help shift a level of consciousness about being more informed and political aware in the wider context, with the intention for them to become critically active citizens in later life. It is hoped that this should lead to pupils being more confident and have the skill base and conviction to work collaboratively within the wider community and organisational contexts. Active participation is thus seen as the 'key to preparing children to live in democratic societies and to exercise social responsibility' (Andrews and Freeman, 1997, p.12).

Print and Coleman (2003) hold the view, however, that if children and young people, as young citizens, live democratically and are able to exercise full participation in decisions as of right, only then will they become independent socially responsible citizens and able to become good citizens in adult life. Notwithstanding these differences, the development of political thinking within the citizenship agenda has been a means of helping pupils gain an understanding about how they might assert their right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. In some quarters, these developments have shown a real change in attitude and opinion as the capitalisation of the lived experiences of young

citizens has challenged the many firmly held preconceptions and long-held belief about the capabilities of children and young people. This has led to a break down in the stigmatisation of them in the public perception. Two good examples are the National Youth Parliament and even Lord Sugar's Young Apprentice programme, which was widely viewed on television.

Hart, (1992, p. 5) supports these developments with his assertion that it is unrealistic to expect children and young people to become responsible, participating adults without having had some prior exposure to the skills needed to be active citizens during their informative and development years. They (the children) need to have some understanding about what it involves and the responsibilities it entails so that they can have a conceptual notion of community identity, democracy and participation (Kerr, 2003). Of course, there are those who believe that children should also be able to have the right not to participate (Deardoff, 1996, Pridmore, 2000) and advocate that young citizens should be given the right not to take part in the decision making processes, if that is their expressed wish. Notwithstanding, Kerr (1999) believes that the citizenship or civic educational programme is constructed broadly to include the preparation of children and young people for playing a role and taking responsibility in society when they become adults themselves. Osler and Starkey (1996) declare that citizenship education is concerned with both the personal development of pupils and the political and social development of society. Therefore, by implication, the framework of the citizenship agenda is intended to strengthen democracy. To this extent, it creates the foundation for power-sharing (Andrews and Freeman, 1997) between the adult citizen and the young citizen, especially as participation

itself is at the heart of any educational programme on citizenship.

New Labour's focus on the role of children and young people as potential active future citizens is now also a continuing ideological premise of the new Coalition government as part of its 'Big Society' agenda. Longley (2010), however, points out that there are flaws in the Coalition governments 'Big Society' project, which he believes may lead to its undoing. Longley (2010, p.5) says that 'we have allowed ourselves to be seduced by the myth that social problems are for the Government to deal with. No government can solve every problem.' Longley confirms that the 'Big Society' is based on the premise of 'hyper-individualistic philosophy', which relates to turning citizens into consumers and promotes an exaggerated expectation of personal autonomy.

Nevertheless, knowledge, understanding and development of the skills of enquiry, remain the key components for meeting the DfES's (1999, Gearon 2003) requirement for citizenship and learning, which are set out as follows:

- Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens
- Developing skills of enquiry and communication
- Developing skills of participation and responsibility

These three key elements highlight the significance of translating the importance of participation as principles of practice into the citizenship agenda. Citizenship according to Gearon and Brown (2003) helps pupils become better informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights. This automatically implies that there is some form of political learning taking place

which distinguishes it from the development of pupils as self-confident and responsible young citizens and goes beyond the classroom and school environment. Against this notion of 'selfhood' as having a state of distinct identity, individuality and self-centeredness (<http://www.answers.com/topic/selfhood>, September 2011), there emerges a picture of how individuals and society can be viewed as separate realms. This is because there is a division, according to Smith (2001), between individuals and society and between individuals and the social world. The difficulties arise when conveying a societal plane to personal responsibility, especially when considering that many children and young people are growing up in 'non-egalitarian societies' (Hartas, 2008) with childhood becoming increasingly politicised, given the deep philosophical concern that children and young people are 'being and becoming' (Lee, 2003, p. 106).

Thus, children and young people are portrayed as politically passive despite the push for them to be more involved through the citizenship agenda, which is predominately located within a school setting where participation in the public sphere of school life under the school council process is expected to help pupils gain the 'skills, knowledge and values necessary to understand political problems and to solve conflicts through negotiation' (McCowan, 2006 p.66). Lee (2003) draws out an alternative view by expressing that the figure of the pupil has changed from being one of a 'passive, docile recipient' to that of an 'active and relatively independent creator of information' (p.77) and which supports pupils in understanding more easily the political nature of governance. However, it is doubtful that the desire for a greater level of political consciousness through the citizenship curriculum can by itself be fully achieved simply through the school

council or classroom discussion alone. The answer to this doubt comes from re-emphasising the importance of the wider citizenship participation agenda as part of governmental policy to invoke a political consciousness to run through all of the structures in public and third sector institutions.

Regrettably, I am unable to explore the realities of the active citizenship curriculum as it is currently practiced within a school environment. This is because my research focuses more specifically on the issues and processes surrounding children and young people's participating in decisions which affect their lives.

### **3.7 Empowering Children and Young People**

The many different settings in which children and young people find themselves potentially empowered and able to make a contribution include the family, carer's organisations, the community and many other kinds of institutions and organisations. In these settings, children and young people have important roles as part of the religious, educational, legal, medical, commercial, leisure and social realms and events in which they live – and these roles which children and young people take on have a growing political significance.

It is because children and young people are involved in so many outlets within, and as part of, civil society that the government is trying to improve their conditions as a group to be able to participate effectively, meaningfully and to impact on service improvements. This has led to some fierce arguments about the extent to which children and young people can truly participate in the

decisions that affect them in their contemporary lives. It is therefore, and as a matter of principle, possible to disentangle areas in which young citizens have a legitimate voice. For example, within the school environment, educational institutions are expected to demonstrate, as part of an Ofsted inspection requirements that they have mechanisms in place for pupils to participate in decision making processes and to show that citizenship PSHE lessons are taking place. Within the experiences of these practical applications, it has been recognised that the provision of rights for children and young people means 'reducing the power of hitherto super-ordinate groups of people' (James & Prout, 2007, p. 85).

Certain commentators, such as Ulrich Beck (1992), speak of a shift from the collectivist to more individualised frames of reference as regards responding to children and young people within the social structures of society. Clearly, children and young people are part of a social group in society but are also individual social agents and as such are co-constructors of their social environment. There are dominant political and social scientific discourses that tend to view children and young people as 'victims' (Beck, 1992) of change. The ways children and young people construct and manage their social identities within the change agenda are important factors for empowering young citizens to believe they have a right to be involved and to participate proactively.

One of the 'common criticisms of young people' (Barham, 2006, p. 12) is the view that children and young people are in many ways fragmented and disconnected from local communities and indeed from various other institutions in society such

as the police and local government, all of which creates obstacles that can impinge on their ability to actively engage, participate and feel empowered. This has been evident recently with the 2011 riots, which have occurred in many of the cities across the UK. Consequently, social factors need to be acknowledged and addressed if public institutions and local organisations are to strengthen relations to help build a culture of active participation within mainstream activities for young citizens in local communities.

It is the 'Enlightenment' (Giddens, 2002) philosophers, such as Karl Marx, (Morrison, 2006) who have helped to create a more formative understanding of learning from history to free society and from the habits or prejudices of occurrences, such as in the experiences of public and political outrage of the UK riots in favour of bringing back controlled stability and predictability in society as a whole. Social construction, subjectivity and authenticity are according to James and Prout (1997, p.27) 'bound up in the major theoretical debate of contemporary sociology: that is, the problem of the relationship between agency (or action) and structure in social life'. The central concept of Emile Durkheim (Morrison, 2006) believed that individuals do not exist by themselves autonomously but that all citizens form part of a social attachment to commonly held beliefs and collective purposes that act to focus individual's interests outside the self and promote a social bond between institutions and social groups. Thus, having a reliance on one another in favour of social obligation has the tendency to act as a check against individualism. The call to create opportunities for children and young people to participate in influencing decisions is not an optional extra but an essential duty for meeting the civil rights of the young citizen. Equally, this will

tend towards linking children and young people to a common social purpose, which according to Morrison (2006) will give them meaning by promoting the idea that they are part of a larger social group.

There are challenges, of course, in achieving this objective in order to enable children and young people to engage more than has previously been orchestrated. Opening up channels of improved communication processes to provide clearer information, advice and guidance on citizenship was seen by New Labour as an essential priority in furthering these goals. These aims were based upon the concept of a modern civic society that is founded on 'opportunity and responsibility, rights and duties going together' (Fairclough, 2003, p.38). In other words, society has a duty to its citizens and its citizens have a duty to society (Blair, 1999).

### **3.8 Listening to Children and Young People**

Fundamental to the changing role of the welfare state, according to Lewis (2007, pp. 1-24) is the stress placed on listening to the voice of the child, which is being reflected in the reciprocal and fundamental changes taking place within the context of family life today. Significant to these considerations is the degree to which adults have gained sufficient experiences of being involved with and listening to children and young people voices (Alderson, 1995, Davie et al., 1996). As well as the need to acknowledge the importance of listening, it is crucial to see involvement with children and young people being a matter of their need, right and skill base (James and Prout, 1997) that looks to enabling them to participate in the first place. The principle that children should be consulted about



the things that affect them can all too often be met, I believe, with adult resistance, which might be as a consequence of adults simply feeling 'awkward' about how best to respond to children because of their lack of experience. This inability to relate may also be connected to a fear that in some way, or to some degree, their authority could be undermined. In these circumstances, what is lacking is the adults' ability to communicate effectively with children and young people.

The notion of 'pedagogy of listening' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005. p. 97) examines the complexities of listening to children. The meaning of listening is defined as 'being open to others and what they have to say'..... and 'produces meanings and reciprocal modifications that enrich all the participants in this type of exchange' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005. p. 97). Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003) provide a practical guide for listening to, and consulting with children particularly for the under 5 years. They identify a number of key principles, which it could be argued are applicable to all ages of young citizens. This pedagogy of listening approach comes from the 'Reggio Emilia' (Clark and Moss, 2008, Pascal & Bertram, 2009) pedagogical ideas and practices in Northern Italy (Clark and Moss, 2008). Within these ideas is the belief that listening to and respecting the contribution made by children and young people can enhance not only their relationship with adults, but also through this, provide a positive platform from which it is hoped children and young people will actively participate in civil society.

From these studies, it is evident that adults do find it challenging when it comes to

learning how to effectively communicate with children and young people in order to extract their views. Equally there is difficulty in recognising the multi-layered ways in which young citizens express themselves, so that all children, no matter what their background and language, are included and given equal value. The recognition of the multi-layered component of listening has been formulated into the 'Mosaic Approach' by Clark and Moss (2008), who present an image of a framework for listening as a picture made up of many small pieces, which need to be brought together in order to make sense of the whole impression. The Mosaic approach gives young children the opportunity to demonstrate their perspectives in a variety of ways of listening which 'acknowledges children and adults as co-constructors of meanings. It is an integrated approach which combines the visual and the verbal' (Clark and Moss, 2008, pp1-10). Clark and Moss (2008) stipulate that the framework for listening include the following:

- *Multi-method*: recognises the different 'voices' or languages of children
- *Participatory*: treats children as experts and agents in their own lives
- *Reflexive*: includes children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on meaning, addresses the question of interpretation
- *Adaptable*: can be applied in a variety of early childhood institutions
- *Focused on children's lived experiences*: can be used for a variety of purposes including looking at lives rather than knowledge gained or care received
- *Embedded into practice*: a framework for listening which has the potential to be both used as an evaluative tool and to become embedded into early years practice (Clark and Moss, 2008, p 5)

The art of listening is important because adults have to concern themselves with truly listening to children, a perspective which is not about a 'competition but standing together in the construction of dialogues, in which there is mutual respect, active participation and the negotiation and co-construction of meaning' (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). What Pascal and Bertram go on to stress is that the importance of listening concerns 'empowering children as learners, enabling them to make choices, express ideas and opinions and to develop a positive sense of self'. This in turn should, according to Willow (2002), engender positive and respectful relationships between young and old people and foster respect for human rights which will break down barriers and prejudice. In this way, children and young people become members of the wider community and as such are 'more capable and involved citizens...with respect for the principles and practice of democratic life' (Miller, 1997 in Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

### **3.9 Informing Children and Young People**

The concept of promoting children's rights is, of course, far more complex than just simply implementing the UNCRC 1989 into national law. It concerns, for example, the manner in which these rights are received and the way in which they are interpreted at the many different layers and levels of both national and local governance, policy and procedures. Even with a good policy and procedural base, what is crucial is the translation into actual practice at grass roots level within the organisation. This therefore requires a radical change in adult's attitudes and approaches as they interact with young citizens. In response to these challenges, the New Labour government set a policy agenda to help organisations recognise the value of making these provisions.

The first of these considerations was to recognise the importance of information. There is according to Lee (2003) a 'cocooned innocence of childhood, dependent on adult caregivers' ability to filter information coming from the outside world' (p.87). Lee draws attention to the fact that the day to day control of information to children and young people has often, to a large extent, though sometime unintentionally, been about 'controlling children's access to information'. The control of information is a critical aspect of the participation process because without a good flow of adequate information to inform young citizens it is going to be harder for them to sufficiently engage in all areas of decision making processes. They will not necessarily know, for example, what information is important and relevant for decisions to be made competently and effectively. It is also necessary to be aware of the fact that each childhood group will have its own distinctive way of managing information channels.

Notwithstanding, it can be argued that there are a number of general principles applicable to the way information should be presented. According to these principles, the form of the information should be set out so that it is capable of being understood by the particular target audience, which might, for example, mean that it is presented in a 'child friendly' way (use of language) that is appropriate to the age and understanding of the particular child or young person. In addition, the information should take account of the context in which the information giver is presenting the information and it should be clear and set out in a medium which is easily understood.

The consequence of not giving information in an appropriate form to children and

young people when inviting them to join the decision making process, can create, in itself, a barrier to maturation development. In his acknowledgment of this danger Lee points out that 'the informational control of becoming has helped to *silence* children relative to adults' (2003, p.87). This has, no doubt, caused children and young people at times to be deprived of having a voice of their own. It is apparent from Lee's (2003) perspective, that there are forms of childhood ambiguity which complicate attempts to 'recognise' children and young people as speakers in their own right. This is, I feel, to some degree, a form of 'adultism' as presented by Bell (2005), as it looks at issues such as respecting children and young people as an identified group without which the 'distribution of human dignity and recognition' (Lee, 2003, p. 88) can be lost.

The concept of young citizens being 'social actors' (Hill & Tisdall, 1997 p. 20) and not merely 'human becomings' (Lee, 2003, Hill & Tisdall, 1997, Qvortrup et al, 1994) can create a certain level of ambiguity, brought about by a common view that children and young people are not capable of having particular views about their own status. This is because they have been 'allotted 'proper' physical places in society' (Lee, 2003, p.55). Regrettably, this can all too readily become a rationalisation for marginalising children and young people for the convenience of adults. It must be recognised that young citizens have had very little control over the information they receive and little formal control over 'space and time, decision and resources' (Hill & Tisdall, 1997, p 20).

In addition, where the techniques used by adults for filtering information in the name of 'preservation' (Lee, 2003) is made, this is in reality one way of

maintaining a distinctive power base to justify why children and young people need to be protected, thus preserving the apparent legitimacy of action by adults to act on behalf of children and young people. In essence such action can form a barrier that denies them the ability and right to act for themselves. The deliberate or unintentional restriction of informational knowledge to deny children and young people their right to fully understand what is taking place when sat at the decision making table, is to a large degree, a power that is held by adults. Such actions, even where they are unintentional, can lend themselves to the adult construct that thinks of adults as 'knowing more than children' (Lee, 2003 p.89). This is the defence according to Lee (2003), that results in adults depending upon the need for the preservation of their 'superiority as knowers' (Lee, 2003, p.89). The moral dimension of informational knowledge is important to recognise. If all of the information a child receives is dependent on the adult providing it within a process, which preserves and protects what information should be filtered, then logically it can be held that 'everything the child knows is known second-hand' (Lee, 2003, p. 89). All that the child or young person is able to 'say can be said better, more completely, by an adult' (Lee, 2003. p. 89).

Whilst there are strengths and weaknesses in this argument, it nonetheless, perhaps illustrates a major reason why many adults have come to believe that they are uniquely placed to determine what is in the best interest of the child in any given situation. Consequently, the more dependent a child is the less likely will their 'voice' be listened to. It is important to recognise that within this rationale, certain cultures and/or those who are economically marginalised may be more prone to control measures than others. There is also a danger of

'passivity'. This creates a dependency in the name of protection which silences the child or young person's voice. Lee (2003) emphasises that this effectively means that the adult is in a position to say what needs to be said much more completely than if a child or young person was to be given the opportunity to express their views. Following on from this form of reasoning, then, there would 'simply never be cause to consult a child about any important matter' (Lee, 2003, p. 89). The voice of the young citizen could safely be ignored because it could be 'replaced by a more reliable, adult source' (Lee, 2003, p.89). The idea, therefore, that children and young people are not equipped with the necessary skill base and experience to share in the decision making process because they are not knowledgeable with the appropriate information, or that they are 'incomplete becomings' (Lee, 2003, Hill & Tisdall, 1997, Qvortrup et al, 1994) is part of their 'social construction' (Butler & Williamson, 1994, p. 49), which is partially devised by adults with little reference to the actual experiences of, and knowledge base, of children and young people themselves.

This epistemological perspective points to a paradigm that is centred on adultism, in that the justification expressed for adults continued control is based on the assumption that 'if whatever the young citizen is saying happens to be important, it would seem that an adult probably knows it already' (Lee, 2003, p.89). This trivialisation of the young citizens' views is part of the adultism discourse offered by Bell (2005, 2009) and Qvortrup et al. (2004), who says that children and young people are a quintessential minority group, defined by their subordinate relationship to adults as the dominant group. In this perspective, children and young people are marginalised in an adult thinking world and can result in major

restrictions on children's access to their rights.

### 3.10 The concept of 'Adultism'

According to Fletcher (2010), the founder of 'The Freechild Project' (Fletcher, <http://freechild.org/adultism.htm>), adultism is described as an 'addiction to the attitudes, ideas, beliefs and actions of adults'. In this sense, the adultism paradigm is founded on the belief that adults are superior to young citizens. Accordingly, it is characterised as a hard uncompromising form of behaviour in the way adults interact with children and young people and has its origins in the perspective that they should be '*seen and not heard*'. This belief is reinforced by the structures of society through social institutions, laws, beliefs, customs and attitudes.

Such forms of oppression and discrimination against people who are young can therefore be seen as relating to a mode of 'mistreatment or silencing' (<http://www.youthrights.net>, September 2009) of young citizens. This is because 'adultism', as presented by Bell ([www.freechild.org/bell.htm](http://www.freechild.org/bell.htm), October 2009, & 1995) and Sazama (<http://www.youthrights.net/index.php?title=Adultism> September 2009) is fundamentally related to the abuse of power over children (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adultism> September 2009). Bell stresses that 'adultism' extends even to oppressing children as young citizens through 'physical and sexual abuse', 'punishments and threats', which include being arbitrarily and unfairly treated or denied privileges, as well as to being 'denied control', which relates to control over their bodies, their space and possessions, and to 'verbal interactions'. This includes adults talking down to young people or



pretending that they are just not present. Finally, he asserts that adultism extends to 'community incidents', which relates to young citizens being under surveillance when in the community and the assumption through stereotyped images that sees children as being 'up to no good'.

Bell's idea (1995 and 2009) has arisen from the notion that adults are increasingly required to understand the particular condition of the 'youth'. In 1996, Sazama, writing as an 'adultism' expert with the organisation known as 'Youth on Board', explained that:-

"Young people are systemically mistreated and disrespected by society, with adults as the agents of the oppression. The basis of young people's oppression is disrespect. Manifestations of the oppression include: systematic invalidation, denial of voice or respectful attention, physical abuse, lack of information, misinformation, denial of any power, economic dependency, lack of rights and any combination of the above" (<http://www.youthrights.net>, September 2009).

From this explanation it is clear that the impact of adults on the lives of young citizens is enormously important. In many ways it is surprising that the 'adultism' paradigm is so relatively new given the potential harm that can clearly be and has been manifest, in for example the many recent cases of child abuse (baby P).

The damaging potential of adultism attitudes and actions in society caused by mistreatment and disrespect cannot be ignored and has led to the 'adultism' paradigm being extended to posit that adults' exploitation of children is in fact often reinforced by the social institutions in wider society, including within the

prevailing cultures, customs and attitudes. It believes that when children and young people are ignored, silenced, neglected or punished within the established structures and cultural spheres that exist in society, their experiences of 'adultism' can be found to have begun from the day they were born until everyone around them recognises them as being adults themselves. In this sense, 'adultism' can be viewed as another word for 'youth oppression' as it considers young citizens less important than, and inferior to adults, and does not take young people seriously or 'include them as decision makers' (Bell, 2009, <http://www.freechild.org/bell.htm> February 2009).

This picture does not necessarily mean that all adults can be viewed in this way. In fact, many adults, if asked, I believe, would not admit to behaving oppressively towards young citizens at all. This does not mean, however, that these adultism practices, which can often go unrecognised are not still widespread in society. Their influence can often take more subtle forms particularly within hierarchical dominant institutions such as within the legal system, which can so often silence and misrecognise children and young people as not having equal status to adults based on the need to protect them.

It is important to note at this juncture, that Hart (2002) seeks, in my view, to shift the paradigm associated with adultism, in relation to participation action with children and young people, by exploring the mechanisms and levels in which adults actually engage with young citizens. In doing this, Hart (2002) sets out a model based on a ladder with 8 rungs to identify the power dynamics that adults exert over young citizens, which he calls 'Children's Participation from Tokenism

to Citizenship' (see Figure 3.1). Hart (2002) identifies the first three rungs – 'Manipulation', 'Decoration' and 'Tokenism' as forms of engagement which are totally non-participatory. These represent the more extreme forms of adultism. The remaining five rungs set out a number of increasing degrees of participation in which children take on greater more equal involvement in the process. By means of these various levels of differentiation, it is possible to acknowledge that there are clear instances and occasions where children and young citizens can and do behave and participate effectively.

Hart's (1997) participation ladder can be particularly effective in helping organisations consider how they might assess their own engagement practices. To this end, it can be used very specifically to verify whether there are adultism characteristics in organisational structures and operational performance. This is useful because increasingly organisations are expected to demonstrate that they are listening to the views and actively engaging with young citizens.

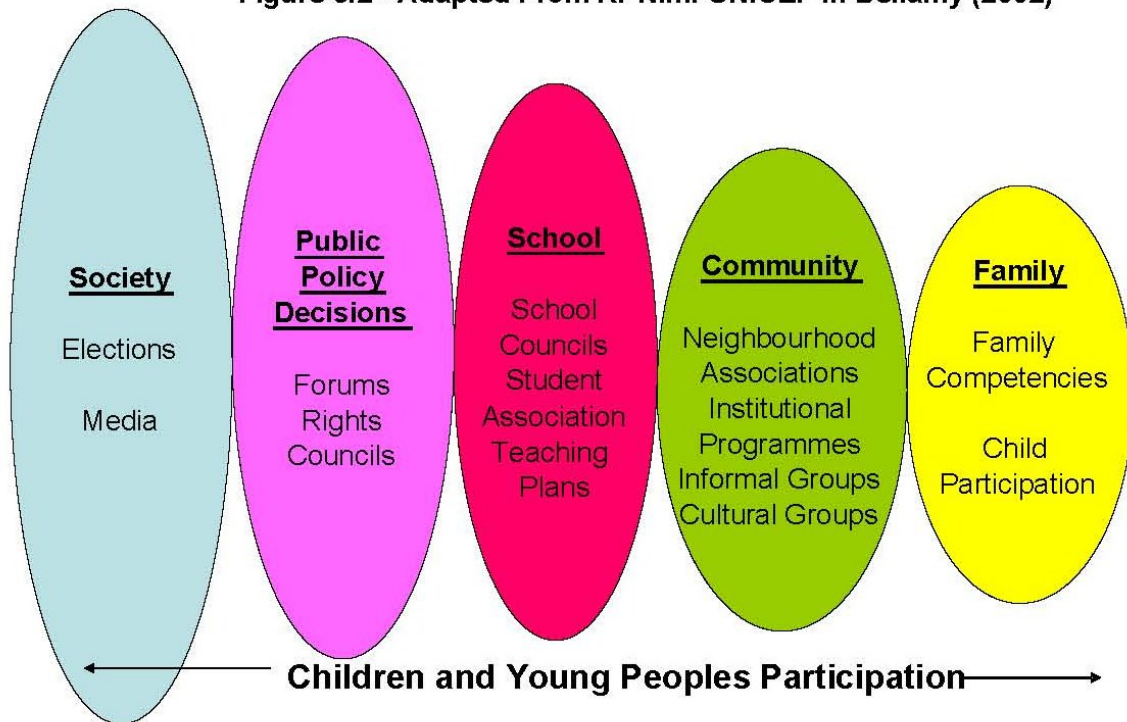
Hart effectively posits a paradigm shift in adultism, in that he rejects the fact that children and young people are essentially weak and incapable. Rather, Hart is in favour of a developmental maturation process that supports young citizens as having the intellectual capacity to participate, although notably this is always within a framework of adult guidance and power base. As a result, however, of Hart's model it is possible to identify the fact that adults can, as often happens, move ahead in making decisions for children and young people without thinking that young citizens can contribute and impact in an effective way to the process. What Hart has drawn out in his representation is a challenge to all adults, to look

at the variety of ways in which the degrees of non-participation can manifest themselves in different environments when seeking to recognise children and young people's naturally developing capacities.

In considering these many and varied forms of social and environmental contexts, Bellamy (2002) suggests that, as children grow and develop, opportunities for participation increase and spread out from the private to the public sphere and from local to global influences, as indicated in Figure 3.2 below, which I have slightly adapted to show the different forms of context in which children and young people find themselves today. This analysis shows that from early childhood, children first begin to develop family competencies in respect to their participation experiences, which if cultivated, can develop further into the community sphere, then into the school, followed by public policy involvement and finally into wider society. The diagram helps to illustrate the value and opportunity that exists for nurturing children and young people along the continuum of their life journey from childhood to adulthood. It also demonstrates how important the role is that is played by organisations in both statutory and the third sector in encouraging young citizens to engage and participate in decisions which affect their lives and in helping them to move along this continuum.

The variety, form and processes surrounding young citizen's 'participation' makes this subject area open to a wide range of definitions and a multitude of interpretations within each stage. Whilst, the dictionary definition of 'participation' refers to sharing, contributing and partaking, in so far as it is connected with young citizen engagement, at its centre, it is concerned with furthering the basic

Figure 3.2 - Adapted From R. Nimi UNICEF in Bellamy (2002)



democratic principle of active collaborative involvement in the decision making process for effecting change that is likely to have a direct effect on the lives of those involved. Within these broad terms, other important and distinct modes of communication need to be defined, such as 'involvement', 'collaboration', 'consultation' and 'listening'. The word 'involvement', for example, includes a broader awareness of 'associations with' and 'connections to'. And the word 'consultation' means to 'discuss', or 'check out with', or to 'confer with others', whilst 'collaboration' includes a certain active engagement and responsibility for a shared perspectives and outcomes. The application of these distinctions in forms of communication can help challenge the preconceived ideas or commonly held false adult assumptions, which can also unconsciously set limits on the form of communication that is entered into when conversing with children and young people. To some extent, however, I believe that these preconceptions and

unconscious forms of behaviour may also be explained as being expressive of an adult's uncertainty or *awkwardness* in knowing how best to relate and respond to children and young people.

### 3.11 Concluding Comments

In consideration of these theories and analysis, I acknowledge that whilst there is merit in Bell's belief that children and young people experience such forms of oppressive situations, I am of the view, that in the main, they represent a rather dark and harsh extreme, which is in the minority. Although, I would have no desire to diminish the seriousness that arises with situations of abuse, I am nevertheless conscious that there is a danger of creating a false impression of reality. I am, for example, reminded of the retort by Matilda's father, 'I'm smart, you're dumb, I'm big, you're little, I'm right you're wrong' in Roald Dahl - *Matilda* (1988), which seems to me, represents an accurate caricature of adultism as manifest in Bell's view of the adult and child and young person's interaction. Clearly, in the case of Matilda's father, we can all recognise certain traits, which point towards a partial truth, yet are nonetheless clearly more the exception than the norm. When looking at Hart's model, I believe, it lacks a certain degree of effectiveness, in that it assumes adults can understand and recognise their own adultism actions, as for example when exemplified in the manifestation of rungs 1 - 3, which Hart calls 'non-participation'. Thus, I am in favour of a softer more considered analysis. One which balances the good intentions (clearly and deliberately absent in Matilda's father) that ordinarily gives rise to a more 'benevolent' form of action in adults when looking to understand and explain why they find it difficult to provide a platform for young citizens to be listened to and

have a 'voice', in the form supported by Fielding (2008 and 2011).

It is also important to stress that 'adults' are the product of their own lived experiences and often, in my view, simply lack the practical skills to be able to relate more effectively with children and young people. What is needed is a new dialogue that unveils these various learnt cultural, psychological and behavioural modes, prejudices and forms of communication, which have stilted progress in young citizen participation.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY – CASE STUDY STRATEGY AND TRIANGULATION APPROACH

*“Case study research continues to be an essential form of social science inquiry” (Yin, 2003a, p.xi).*

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have set out within the policy and literature reviews the evolution in academic thought and policy, which has framed the rights of children and young people and the factors affecting participation. Building upon this, I will in Chapter 4 translate the critical analysis that has emerged, into a methodology that can test out and explore my fundamental research aims, innovative research investigation methods undertaken directly with children and young people. The absence of any established, clear and unequivocal set of principles or practices which can be universally adopted and applied to promote effective participation with children and young people is evidence of the need for further study of this nature. In addition, the complex nature of the many variables and challenges associated with the participation agenda with children and young people requires a new form of ‘hands-on’, action-oriented investigation. Which simultaneously meets the requirement for rigour.

Ultimately, this led me to conduct the research within a methodological framework that sought to maximise the input of young citizens. As a result, I adopted the Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP) construct that has its roots in the



concept of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This approach places an emphasis on empowering the children and young people as participants, to become true co-workers in the research process itself. From an ontological perspective, the principles of inclusion and equality are deeply embedded in this particular research methodology. Indeed, this objective was evidenced in my own on-going critical reflection during the course of the fieldwork, on my role as a researcher. As my reflective account of the methodology and process of the IGWP with the children and young people will show (see Appendix 4), I became a participant in the very participative processes which had taken place. The requirements that underpin PAR methodology (Care & Kremmis, 1986, Reason & Bradbury, 2001, McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) include working directly with the participants. The epistemological processes of data collection prompted reactions in the fieldwork settings, both for the young people and the adult teachers/supervisors, which involved the researcher (me) and the researched (children and young people) forming an interlocking relationship. I became, not merely an outsider (looking in) but also, at times, one of the insiders, giving rise to a number of tensions and dilemmas which were evident during the fieldwork activities. McNiff, (2002, <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp>, accessed October 2011) emphasises the interactive and co-connective nature of this form of research when she states:

“Essentially Participatory Action Research (PAR) is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographical and other contexts which make sense of it. ....Participatory action research is not just research which is hoped that

will be followed by action. It is action which is research, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them – whether that is to implement a central policy or an organisational or service change. Instead it tries to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be helped, determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry.” (In Wadsworth, 1998, [http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/p-ywads\\_worth98.htm](http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/p-ywads_worth98.htm), accessed October 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory\\_action\\_research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_action_research), accessed October 2011).

Importantly, the PAR approach has been located within an overarching ‘case study’, methodology, which is according to Yin (2003b) ‘the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context’ (p.4). The phenomenon here concerned the variability of the participatory voice of children and young people (aged 11 – 16 year olds) within a number of organisational contextual settings. The selection of the organisational settings provided an opportunity to establish the research across both the public and third sector, which was intrinsic to my main research question arising from the policy review. It further provided the opportunity to ensure that there was representation from a wide range of social and economic contexts to provide space where the voice of children and young people from differing backgrounds could be heard. I was very keen to include the voice of those from hard to reach groups (Pomerantz, Hughes and Thompson, 2007) in the community, who often, find it difficult to engage, as they may be seen as a disadvantaged group and have low expectations and experience of being included and involved.

Taken together, the case studies (all Birmingham based) have afforded a diverse richness. They included a pilot study which was based in a community school in an inner City area, a girls' school which was a private independent fee paying school in an affluent section of the City, looked after children involving young citizens who had been taken into local authority care and were living in either foster or children's homes across the City and a (all male) Muslim youth group which was in the East side of the City and who were predominantly from Asian Pakistani backgrounds.

Finally, this discussion of the development of the methodology will also examine and consider the associated processes of data collection, analysis and evaluation, which ultimately underpinned the 'reliability, validity, generalizability' (Bryman, 2008, p.60) of the research findings.

#### **4.2 What was the Literature and Policy Review Telling Me?**

The journey towards a definitive form of methodology, however, began by first drawing together the key issues arising from undertaking the policy and literature review and to analyse the relationships between the different aspects. The following key factors illustrate the division of themes from which I drew a number of conclusions.

1. **Philosophy** - From an examination of the underlining philosophical perspective, it is clear that the drive towards greater citizenship participation in society finds its roots in the democratic principles of 'inclusion' and 'equality'. Within this ontological perspective, the developing rights agenda for children and

young people and the greater 'voice' of children and young people are being understood as an important and specific participation category in its own right. From this recognition, the developing paradigm of the sociology of childhood sees children and young people as potential contemporary assets in promoting the Government's major philosophical agenda of strengthening democratic engagement. Equally, there is a growing recognition and understanding of the important impact that children and young people have on the cultural context in which they operate and that they are not simply passive players in an adult formed world.

It is interesting to note, that the international call to establish children's rights, which was partly rooted in the plight of so many children and young people brought about by war, famine, natural disasters and politically oppressive regimes, can now be seen, in the recent people-led uprisings (Arab Spring) in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, which have been to a large extent, instigated and promoted by the youth in those countries (often through their utilisation of the internet), a reflection of these ontological realities. Perhaps, the promotion of children's rights, which few people, irrespective of their culture, background or politics, would not support has in some form paved the way to creating the voice which now demands change.

What appears to be evident in this example is that the pedagogy of listening may have been changed and the voice of the young citizen may be being heard with new understanding and appreciation, which has had a cultural impact on the political situation.

2. **Legal Framework** - Following on from the UNCRC 1989 declaration and its adoption into UK law, the previous New Labour Government brought forward additional laws for new structural changes. Central to this was the Children Act 1989 & 2004, which sets out the 'Every Child Matters' key objectives to be delivered at a local level within the established local authority governance settings. Allied to this was the establishment of 'Collaborative Partnerships', 'Children's Trusts' and 'Neighbourhood Charters'. Within the education system, the 'National Curriculum' has been developed and has incorporated into it a new citizenship programme aimed at developing skills and creating new forums for children and young people with the view of fostering a 'voice' and promoting democratic principles. It is also apparent that within these developments the 'law' offers an important and unique avenue through which social realities can be experienced and shaped, and which impact on the lives of both adults and children and young people alike and the social constructs through which people interpret their lives. Arguably, it is through legislation, more than any other medium, that it is possible to discern the attitudes which underpin the political agenda and casts a light, according to Leira & Saraceno (2008) on how 'society feels about the future'.

3. **Factors Affecting Participation** - Identifying the aims and objectives arising from the neo-liberal philosophy underpinning New Labour's response to the UNCRC's 1989 declaration on the Rights of the Child, with its strong focus on framing 'childhood' as an investment in the future, is, of course, not enough - it is important to address the mechanics involved in advancing effective participation and promoting a young citizen's voice. Questions immediately arise concerning

issues of child development, and in particular its relation to the biological factors of immaturity and how this affects responsibility. This in turn raises the issue of differentiation between adults and children in terms of equality. In addition, there are questions concerning the cynicism which adults' sometimes display in their attitudes towards children and young people concerning the abilities and the skills needed by adults to engage fully in the processes of young citizens' participation. Alongside these matters, are issues of structural capacity in organisations, such as the authority and leadership which are required in order create and implement new and effective participatory mechanisms, including the setting of the necessary budgets and allocation of appropriate resources to implement the changes required to develop meaningful engagement forums, practices and evaluation structures.

In summary, the conclusions that I have drawn has led me to identify the following key points:

1. That participation with children and young people is rooted in issues of equality and inclusion
2. That children and young people are legitimate agents in their own right and have rights to certain goods and services as members of society and the democratic social framework
3. That the new paradigm of sociology of childhood promotes children and young people as unique assets, confronting the notion of 'separateness' from the adult world
4. That engagement with children and young people will strengthen social cohesion
5. That children and young people have established legal rights
6. That issues of children and young people's age, maturation etc, are not prohibitive but rather mechanical issues affecting participation

7. That participation involving children and young people demands particular attitude and skill set in adults
8. That young citizens require exposure to participatory experiences in decision making processes
9. That the 'voice' of children and young people is not a singular expression, nor is the method of exercising it. Equally, the authenticity of this 'voice' can vary.

### **4.3 Research Design - Forms and Concepts**

Following on from an assessment of the key factors, it was then necessary to undertake an evaluation of the various methods of investigation that would be suitable to this field. A research project of this kind is not simply an enquiry but is an attempt to carry out research which is 'on and with people, outside the safe confines of the laboratory' (Robson, 2005, p. 59). With this in mind, I took note of the five concepts of Fuller & Petch (1995, p. 33) who suggested that the potential researcher should first step back from the detailed conduct of the individual piece of research and the potential enquiry and examine which forms/concepts of investigation would be most appropriate. Fuller & Petch's five concepts are:

1. Qualitative and quantitative research
2. Control Groups
3. Sampling
4. The user perspective
5. Pluralistic evaluation

Fuller & Petch (1995) believe that these five concepts help to 'demystify the process' (p. 34) since they represent the basic 'building blocks or pegs' on which to hang the discussion of any potential piece of work. I have, in developing my

understanding of these techniques and their relevance, found them to be invaluable not only to my initial specific proposals for a research methodology but also to the ongoing evaluation of whether these methods were proving appropriate throughout the research process.

At the same time, I was conscious that the research design needed to continually focus back on the purpose of the study and to this end, it was important and necessary to create a 'blueprint' (Yin, 2003a p. 21), which Philliber, Schwab & Samsloss (1980, in Yin 2003b, p. 21) suggests should include the following:

1. What questions to study
2. What data is relevant
3. What data to collect
4. How to analyse the results

The review and analysis of the literature and policy context enabled me to begin formulating and forming an initial 'blueprint', based on the following issues:

**1. What Questions to Study** - In response to this issue, I set out the following research question and 4 subsidiary aims and questions:

**Central research question**

**“How effectively do public and third sector organisations encourage and engage with children and young people to participate in the decision making processes affecting their lives?”**

**Subsidiary research aims and corresponding questions:**



**Aim 1.** To explore the benefits, if any, for children and young people's participation within the case study settings.

**Question:** "What are the benefits within the case study organisations from children and young people's participation in decision making processes?"

**Aim 2.** To assess the influencing factors which enable children and young people to participate in decision making processes.

**Question:** "How do different organisational and engagement factors influence the extent of the children and young people's participation in decisions within the different case study settings?"

**Aim 3.** To understand the perceptions that children and young people have about how adults treat them when they are involved in the participation processes.

**Question:** "What are children and young people's perceptions of how they are treated by adults when involved in participation processes?"

**Aim 4.** To examine the capabilities that children and young people have to enable them to participate effectively in decision making processes.

**Question:** "What abilities and competencies do children and young people have to enable them to actively participate in the case study settings?"

**2. What Data is Relevant?** - Based on the questions posed and the kind of data that, I believed, might emerge, I identified the following data as likely to be relevant:

- Observation and evaluation of both adult and children and young people's direct involvement in participation activities
- Recording both adults and children and young people's views and opinions concerning their experiences of participation and involvement
- Examining organisational policy objectives and literature for involvement and participation in action by children and young people
- Examining and evaluating the extent of resources and information provided to facilitate participation processes

**3. What Data to Collect** – Similarly, based on my understanding of the issues arising, my initial assessment of the data that could be gathered generated the following list:

- Organisation literature and policies
- Observation notes on practical exercises
- Questionnaire survey information
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Notes and observations from group work discussions
- Outputs from practical engagement work

**4. How to Analyse the Results?** - Again, as a starting point and given the evidence and material available, I initially considered the following forms of analysis:

- Analysis of facts, values and opinions in data collected
- Quantitative assessment of questionnaires
- Literature and policy comparative assessment
- Qualitative evaluation and data reflection

Having undertaken this exercise, it was clear that certain investigation techniques, most particularly from the five concepts listed by Fuller and Petch

(1995), were going to be central to my study.

Alongside, these particular considerations there was also the need to include factors associated with clarity, as it is vital that 'good research questions are clear' (Robson, 2005 p. 59) in order that the information that emerges is appropriate to the field of enquiry and relevant to it. To this end, according to Robson (2005), the following components of clarity should be considered:

- **Clear** – data are unambiguous and easily understood
- **Specific** – data are sufficiently specific for it to be clear what constitutes an answer
- **Answerable** – it should be possible to see what data is needed to answer the question and how those data will be collected
- **Interconnected** – the questions are related in some meaningful way, forming a coherent whole
- **Substantively Relevant** – they are worthwhile, non-trivial questions worthy of the research effort to be expended (Robson, 2005, p. 59)

#### 4.4 Case Study Strategy

Given the types of research questions which I have formulated, it can be seen that the questions were mainly orientated towards issues of 'how' participation of children and young people can be promoted. Even where the questions appeared directed towards a 'What' question, in fact their intention was essentially to ask 'how many' and how much'. Yin (2003b) sets out the following three conditions to be taken into account in deciding the appropriate form of research strategy, which he details as falling within five basic forms – Experiment, Survey, Archival analysis, History and Case study (p.5):

- The type of research question posed

- The extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events
- The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events

In general Yin (2003b, p.1) states that a case study is the preferred strategy when 'how' questions are being posed and when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. As well as being clearly focused on a contemporary issue, my chosen forms of data collection and analysis meant that I would need to work directly with children and young people as part of my research and that this would reduce the degree of control that I would have over the events which I would be recording and analysing.

Robson (2005) adds that case study research is also appropriate in the development of detailed intensive knowledge about a single case or of a small number of related cases, where the typical features include:

- Selection of a case or related cases of a situation, individual or group of interest or concerns
- Study of the case in its context
- Collection of information via a range of data collection techniques including observation, interview and documentary analysis (Robson, 2005, p. 89)

My research approach incorporates these 'features' which Robinson highlights - children and young people are studied as a 'group' in 'context', utilising 'observation' techniques. Yin (2003b) further adds that within the case study method it is possible to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the case study subjects (p.2) and concludes that it is 'the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context' (p.4).

This was particularly relevant, I felt, since the phenomenon studied here concerns the variability of the participatory voice of children and young people (aged 11 – 16 year old) within a number of organisational contextual settings. In this study, the organisational settings had to include both the public and third sectors, in line with the main research question. Moreover, a case study strategy is ideally suited to exploratory research as affirmed by Thomas (2011, p.104) who identifies the potential of a case study strategy for exploring a 'seemingly amorphous problem' in which the researcher may only have a small amount of preliminary knowledge and/or a one-dimensional familiarity with it, based loosely on partial knowledge. Consequently, the exploratory research in this study, which seeks to establish appropriate means to engage directly with children and young people, has chosen a case study strategy.

#### **4.5 Surveys and Interviews**

Within the case study Strategy, the collection of data, by means of surveys with specific questions tailored to each case study context, provides an important platform to generate a wealth of material both in respect of the context and in gaining an overview of the issues being investigated. The raw evidence has the advantage of helping to support other less defined and more subjective analysis and findings. The use of semi-structured interviews, for example, as a data collection tool in qualitative research is seen as a very good way of 'accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality' (Punch, 2005, p. 168). It also helps in the process of 'cross-checking findings deriving from both quantitative and qualitative research' (Bryman, 2001, p.274).

The questionnaire survey approach according to Punch (2005, p.99) is not just a descriptive tool but rather a 'multi-variable survey, seeking a wide range of information, and some conceptual framework of independence and control'. This is because a survey can lend itself to a 'fact-gathering questionnaire' (Punch, 2005, p. 92) which can be specific in nature, as well as being able to seek a wide range of information including some less factual details, such as 'background and bio-graphical information, knowledge and behavioural information and will also include measures of attitudes, values, opinions and beliefs' (ibid, p.99). Whilst a questionnaire survey based simply on responses from case study participants has weaknesses, it provides, nonetheless, a good tool for obtaining subjective reflective information from the respondents. It also offers the opportunity to link strongly to other empirical investigations, such as those in the literature and policy reviews outlined in the previous chapters and has the advantage of advancing 'knowledge and understanding of the given topic' (Yin, 2003b, p. 3).

The limitation of a survey based on an individual case study has long been stereotyped according to Yin (2003a) as a 'weak sibling among social science methods' (p. xiii). This is because the case study approach is seen as having insufficient precision in terms of quantification, objectivity and/or rigour compared with other forms of research. As a consequence, I was conscious of the need to ensure that accurate quantifiable data was correctly recorded. There are, nevertheless, clear advantages of the survey approach due to the fact, for example, that they have no limitations on the size of the survey conducted; questions are designed to be unbiased and lend themselves to future replication. Additionally, 'questions can be designed so that answers from individuals can be

added together to produce results which apply to the whole sample' (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2002, p.79). Other disadvantages, however, do exist, for example, with the survey approach, the researcher is often not in a position to check out at first hand the understandings of the respondents to the questions asked when compared to the advantage and the richness often brought about by a structured interview form. Additionally, in small-scale research projects the 'survey relies on breadth rather than depth for its validity' (p.79). Another disadvantage is the fact that data in the form of tables, pie charts and statistics can become the 'main focus of the research report, with a loss of linkage to the wider theories and issues' (p.79). Awareness that these disadvantages can materialise in the process of undertaking the research is important, in order to help ensure that they are avoided wherever possible. Similarly, it is important to formulate questions to extract as much unbiased data as possible. As a result, I have been mindful to avoid questions which were over-empathic, manipulative or leading.

It is clear that questionnaires have many different advantages over interviews as a survey methodology. They can be undertaken anonymously and are expedient in gathering information. Undertaking a survey questionnaire method also enables one to gather standardised data, which can lend itself to explanatory notes about individual circumstances. This methodology needs little or no interference from the researcher, other than where points of clarification need to be provided and has the advantage of providing results that are objective and independent. There is however, one further drawback when using a survey questionnaire method, in that the response rate may be poor because it relies on

a degree of co-operation, which may not be forthcoming, for example, where there is a lack of motivation or time availability from the respondent, which I will refer to when I address the outcomes of the results in the following chapters.

#### **4.6 Involving Children and Young People in the Process**

Having looked at the various general matters affecting investigation methods and data collection, as well as having identified a number of key issues, it was necessary to examine the specific involvement of children in the process of defining and designing the methodology to be applied to my research. According to Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) there is concentrated interest on children as the 'subjects of research, perceiving them as having something salient to contribute' (p.1). Accepting this to be the case, from the beginning, I believed it to be essential that the children and young people be directly involved in the research delivery. Indeed, I felt that there was an opportunity not only to engage with children and young people but also to utilise the process itself to explore at first hand their participation capabilities through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, pp.154 -167) process.

There are different characteristics, which need to be considered when it comes to carrying out research with children and young people, as opposed to conducting research with adults. The interdisciplinary field of research with young citizens has 'promoted a rethinking of children's traditionally dependent, objectified status within research methods' (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009, p.2). What is fundamental, is that the researcher ought to recognise the citizenship of children and young people so as to 'involve children as (the central) research



participants' (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009, p.2). This lends itself to acknowledging that there is a value base in viewing children and young people as independent competent individuals exhibiting 'human interdependence' (p.5), rather than viewing them through a one-way lens that reconstructs them as essentially reliant upon adults to be exploited and dominated. The opposite approach is more liberating and respectful as it creates a commitment towards mutually beneficial outcomes within the research design. To this end, the researcher's conceptualisation of childhood in the research planning process is likely to be indecisive. This is because there are no agreed criteria for deciding what works when considering the forms and methods to adopt when looking at conducting research directly with children and young people. The associated assumptions of the researcher therefore, play a critical part as 'all of us will come to such activities with our own particular background' (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009, p.2) about what constitutes childhood and the associated issues concerning children and young people in general. What Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) emphasise is that the researcher's perspective is going to influence how the research will be carried out, particularly in terms of the questions posed, the characteristics of the participants, the methods used and the ethical framework.

I recognise that many aspects of this research programme have influenced the way I have approached the research design and methodology, not least from my professional background, experience and learning. I, like Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) am influenced by the rights and participation principles outlined in the UNCRC (1989) for young citizens. I am also swayed by the notion that

children are 'becoming beings' as expressed by Lee, (2003), Hill & Tisdall, (1997) and Qvortrup et al, (1994). This particular concept provides a framework that centres on the value of children and young people as competent citizens and therefore has implications for the whole of the research process. For example, it impacts on the design, method, ethics, participation, analysis and evaluation to be undertaken. The rethinking of 'becoming beings' materialises during the formative years in childhood and increases during the developmental stages as children and young people grow in experience, knowledge and skill base. This should according to Prout (2005), have much potential to enrich research practice. The focus on children and young people's rights can be associated with the notion of the individual as a 'rational, stable, self-controlling being' (Lee, 2003 in Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher 2009). An awareness of this concept necessitates the recognition from the outset that research with young citizens is potentially different from research with adults, principally because of adults' perceptions of children as a constituent group. Punch (2002) illustrates that the way in which the researcher perceives childhood is strongly influenced by the status of children in society (Punch, 2002, pp. 321-341).

The recognition of a 'rights' discourse has been essential when looking at the capabilities of children and young people in the research participation process. Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) distinguish between the rights of children and young people to participate in society within the spirit of the UNCRC 1989 and the rather narrow concept of their rights as a proposed constituent of 'consultation'. They go on to suggest that the 'line between research and consultation is a matter for contention' (p.4). With this in mind, it is acknowledged that there are

going to be some overlaps in the positioning of this research between the different approaches, particularly as the research design is with young citizens in mind. In other words, is the research about children and young people but not directly involving them, or is it coming from a direct approach whereby children and young people are involved and included in the research itself? It has been suggested by Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) that a solution to the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant is to involve them more directly as researchers themselves (Alderson, 2000; Kirby, 1999). Recently, according to Punch (2002) there has been much debate about this (Christensen and James, 2000; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000) as it has implications for the whole research process. It is somewhat contradictory that within the theoretical framework of childhood social construction that many adult researchers call for innovative and progressive techniques for conducting research with children, whilst at the same time also communicating and having regard to the lower competence of children (Punch, 2002, pp 321-341).

Coupled with the intricacies of developing children's involvement in the research processes is the need for some form of evaluative outcome which takes account of the input made by young citizens in the research itself. Clearly, the inclusion of children and young people directly in research will entail different forms of participatory methods. What Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) suggest is that involving young citizens in the component research activities is worthwhile as it opens up new possibilities for children and society more generally (p.4).

In choosing my particular research methods for directly involving children and

young people, I first needed to consider my own ideas regarding childhood as this clearly affects the research design. Of particular importance to me was the need to focus on inclusion and child representation, since this is a good way to ensure that 'children's views and experiences are not only listened to but heard' (p.5). Action research and participatory models in research design are popular for working directly with children and young people, since they offer an approach which can enable and empower young citizens during the research process and which can foster these ends.

#### **4.7 Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, pp.154 - 167) has emerged as a new and evolving approach according to Save the Children (UK) (2001) and offers, I believe, a particularly suitable form of approach in conducting engagement studies with children and young people. There is, however, no single type of action research (Bryman, 2008) typology. It uses both qualitative and quantitative research tools including direct participatory group work activities, group focused discussions, observations and in-depth interviews. The language of participatory research is now much more prevalent (Ismail, 2009) in the research field. This is driven by the emergence of the powerful trend for inclusion (Robson, 2005, p.215), which has come about with the progress of international policy developments and legislative directives such as the UNCRC 1989. The UNCRC places obligations on member states for including children and young people with its commitment to a plethora of children's rights, particularly in the participation of young citizens as 'rational, stable, self-controlling beings' (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, p.3).

From my investigations, it is clear that there is no perfect way to conduct research with children and young people. Not surprisingly, researchers do increasingly have to see the researched, of all ages and backgrounds, being active participants in the research itself rather than being passive recipients. Brock and McGee (2002) confirmed that during the course of the 1980's and 1990's, participation in research entered the 'development of mainstream' (p. 1) with a shift in the function and application of participatory methodologies. There is according to Ismail (2009) an underpinning powerful argument for including the researched, which is grounded on 'moral and political philosophy' (vii). There are clearly 'complex drivers and precipitating factors' (vii) for introducing a participatory approach as a research methodology because it involves having 'members of a social setting collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis' (Bryman, 2008). Improvement and involvement is critical (Robson, 2005) and central to PAR as it requires the direct contributions of participants in the research process. This can take varying forms and degrees for example, from a period of consultation through to full involvement in the development, conduct and evaluation of the research itself. The collaborative nature of PAR is a help to improve practice and understanding so that there is an improvement in the situation in which the practice is taking place (Robson, 2005, p.215).

The close and collaborative relationship between the researcher and the researched fits well with the flexible nature of the participatory approach. However, the consequence of following this method can mean that outcomes are difficult to predict from the outset. Nevertheless, participant experiences are able

to contribute to the research itself in some way, particularly through using qualitative processes such as the strategy of using a case study design as the core of the methodology. Indeed, an advantage of the PAR approach is that the researcher does not have to design in detail the whole research methodology beforehand because the approach allows for refinement as the researcher learns more about the participants. There are drawbacks with a full collaborative approach however, as the researcher loses some power in the decisions about aspects of the design and data collection (Robson, 2005 p.216). As a consequence, in the PAR approach and design that I developed, I was conscious to ensure that I was not just the investigator but also a 'collaborator and a facilitator' (Robson, 2005, p.217). The flexibility of case study design encourages the use of PAR methods as various characteristics of the case study will typically emerge during the data collection and analysis with the participants.

The research approach is expected to accommodate the research situation as the researcher proceeds and it is essential the PAR is flexible enough to take account of participants' needs. The imprecise nature of the research approach allows for research questions to be flexible initially so that questions can be improved whilst proceeding, since the cyclical process of the method allows opportunities to learn from the experience gained. The approach is less constraining than other methods and allows for learning through understanding the participatory experiences. Notwithstanding the flexibility of the method, it is essential that the PAR is rigorous enough, in a recurring process to facilitate critical reflection. It is acknowledged that the approach can sometimes be dismissed for a lack of thoroughness and for being 'too partisan' (Bryman, 2008).

The need to have crucial reflection as part of the research process enables the researcher to consider what has worked well, what has not worked, what has been learnt and what would be done differently next time. In the pursuit of good quality reflective research there are three key elements:

- The involvement of all interested parties provides more information about the situation
- Critical reflection in each cycle provides many chances to correct errors
- Within each cycle the assumptions underlying the plans are tested in action (<http://www.scu.edu.au> , January 2011)

The open-ended approach to PAR allows, however, for not having a fixed hypothesis to begin with as it starts with an idea which is then developed. The basic underlying principle of my research has involved identifying the issues of children's voice and participation in decisions affecting their lives as described in the UNCRC 1989 Article 12. This holds that children and young people have the right to express an opinion and have that opinion taken into account in matters or procedures affecting them, which I wanted to research, mainly because there is now much greater pressure being placed on organisations to demonstrate that they are engaging children and young people to participate in decisions which affect their lives. In my experience, it has been difficult to see how effective this has been in practice as I believe, there is still widespread tokenism being applied, resulting largely from a lack of skill, understanding and/or a true belief in the worth of participatory processes.

In seeking to assess how I might best address the need to empower children's voice, as opposed to respecting it in name only, and how I could test out the

extent to which it was being achieved, I developed a form of disciplined enquiry through the design of an interactive group work programme (IGWP) to be undertaken directly with children and young people in the various settings. Through the evaluation process and research outcomes it is my aim to help inform adult practice as to how such engagement can be effective and productive.

By adopting this form of research approach, I have sought to capture the child's voice, which is often lost. PAR is a valuable tool in helping to understand the complex circumstances and perspectives of children and young people. This is because it can bring out aspects such as personal growth, group development and peer leadership including problem solving skills. PAR provides a means of accountability and accommodates culture, social and diverse differences in order to help break down barriers. In addition, PAR can help children and young people to describe the impact of their experiences in the context of their lives.

Participatory practice in research and enquiry, therefore, in the context of the case study approach, can create opportunities for adopting ways of capturing children and young people's views about their experiences in participating in decisions which affects their lives, so that they can have a voice which is listened to by adults in a non-tokenistic way. The idea of a PAR approach is, in my view, more than an overall guiding philosophy of how to proceed in the research process itself. When researchers talk about participatory research, participatory monitoring and participatory evaluation, on the whole, they are not discussing a self-contained set of methodologies but a situation whereby the methods used have included an element of strong involvement and consultation on behalf of the



subjects being researched (Bennett and Roberts, 2004).

#### **4.8 Triangulation Approach**

To assist the research there needs to be a balance between quantitative and qualitative research methods and styles (Bryman, 2008). To this end, I was mindful that my research should be conducted reliably, that it has validity, and that the methods used were conducted ethically (Bryman, 2008, Farrell, 2005, Robson, 2005). This is important in order to reduce the likely impact of any personal bias, and so that the research could be framed in such a way that the findings would be relevant to those who want to understand more about the way children and young people engage in the decision making process. As a result of these considerations, and having looked at various methodological designs, I felt the most suitable strategy for undertaking the field research component of this study was to adopt a 'triangulation' (Bowling, 2004, p. 201, Bryman, 2001, p.274) research approach. Here, particular 'emphasis tends to be on methods of investigation and sources of data' (Bryman, 2001, p. 274) as it involves using more than one method or source of data in the investigative work.

Triangulation is often associated with quantitative research, however, it can also take place within a 'qualitative research strategy' (Bryman, 2001, p. 274). Generally, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are seen as 'separate paradigms' (Bryman, 2001, p. 444). However, the triangulation approach allows for the checking of results from qualitative methods against those of quantitative methods and vice versa (p. 444). Triangulation means that results of both quantitative and qualitative approaches are cross-checked with the results which come from the other research strategies, for example, quantitative

results from a survey can be cross-checked against the results from semi-structured interviews. Whilst quantitative approaches help in identifying numerical differences between groups, by contrast, qualitative approaches deal with how people understand their experiences. However, the distinction between words and numbers is not as precise as it might appear to be at first sight as can be seen from the following Table 4.1, which summarises the basic differences between the two approaches.

**Table 4.1 - Distinctions between Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches**

<b>Quantitative Approaches</b>	<b>Qualitative approaches</b>
'Simple' numeric data	'Complex' rich data
Measurement	Meaning
Explanation	Understanding
Prediction	Interpretation
Generalised account	Contextual account
Representative population sample	Purposive/ representative perspective sample
Hypothesis-testing	Exploratory
Claims objectivity	Accepts subjectivity
Closed system (experimental control)	Open system (ecological validity)

(<http://www.writing.colstal.edu/guides/research/survey/com>, March 2007)

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2002, p.196) confirm that both approaches offer representations of what 'we' as individuals perceived of as 'our reality'. Both quantitative and qualitative paradigms have a tendency to shade into one another such that it is 'very rare to find reports of research which do not include both numbers and words' (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2002, p.196). Indeed, even

qualitative data may be quantified in some ways (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2002).

As previously confirmed, it was my intent to investigate children and young people's capacity and experiences in being directly engaged in the participation process so that they can form part of the decisions which affect their lives. To this end, my task has been to create an interactive form of methodology that would test the capacity of young citizens to engage in participation activities which relate to three distinct areas — within the case study organisation, within the community and within their leisure/social lives. Alongside this, the methodology needed to identify forms of investigation that could elicit views and opinions in a non-threatening way in order to reveal underlying values and attitudes associated with the participation agenda from both the adult and young citizen perspectives.

From an early stage, as I thought through the possibilities for taking forward the research investigation, I had envisaged undertaking the fieldwork within various case study settings such as schools and community groups. As my understanding of research methods advanced, I settled on a basic 'blue print' for the field research component by obtaining evidence from a 'case study' (Bryman, 2001, p. 28) approach, which would involve conducting a planned interactive group work programme (IGWP) directly with young citizens. I would also undertake semi-structured interviews with key organisational staff with lead responsibilities for the participation of children and young people in decisions. In addition, I would conduct an ammonised organisational questionnaire. All these

approaches to the research methodology would be conducted with consistency, so that the field note data elicited from each of the case study settings would be coherent in analysis and reliable. To achieve this would require that each of the key elements of the methodology is replicable. The form of case study type would be that of the 'representative or typical case' as suggested by Bryman (2008, p. 56). This is a case study type which would 'capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation' (Yin, 2003b, p. 41). Yin (2003b) goes on to suggest that the lessons learnt from this form of case study type are 'assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution' (p.41). Thus, a case study of this nature should exemplify what is the norm for young citizens around participating in decisions which affect their lives.

I was conscious that the methodological approach to the research would also lend itself to a 'narrative account' (Fuller & Petch, 1995, p. 34). In this regard, Bryman (2001, p. 401) asserts that a narrative analysis is an approach where life history research can be used. The material provided by participants in the research through particular qualitative methods of data collection, for example, surveys and interviews, can be viewed in the form of stories that are potentially 'fodder' for a narrative analysis. Although, such methods, by their nature create data which can be less clear, I felt that the triangulation approach would enable a blended combination approach that could offer both an ideal and practical means of assessing a wide ranging data set emerging as a consequence of the research design. A further advantage of this form of data collection and narrative analysis according to Bryman (2001, p. 401) is that it relates not just to the life span of the

investigation process but also includes ‘accounts relating to episodes and the interconnections between them’. This is supported by Yin (2003a, p. 13) who, in speaking more generally about case studies, says that empirical inquiry:

‘Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’.

Allied to these various considerations, Yin (2003a) confirms that each form of research methodology has its own ‘peculiar advantages and disadvantages’ (Yin, 2003a, p. 1) and its purpose need not be a ‘complete or accurate rendition of actual events; but rather, its purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate’ (Yin, 2003a, p.2). With this in mind, the triangulation approach lends itself neatly, I believe, to capturing evidence from more than one source so as to determine what is actually happening within each case study setting. Triangulation serves the purpose of strengthening the convergent validity of the study by utilising multiple methods of measurement and multiple data sources as a means of creating a convincing picture of the study within the overall research design.

#### **4.9 An Interpretive Paradigm**

Finally, as part of my analysis of methodology, I have sought to assess my outlook in respect to my attitudes and hopes in undertaking this research. As a consequence, I believe that I am broadly a traditional researcher within an interpretive paradigm (Grix, 2004, Thomas, 2011), I support the view of Thomas (2011, p. 51) who states that:

‘Interpretivists say that there is no ‘objective’ social world ‘out there’. Rather, it is constructed differently by each person in each situation they face, so it is useful sometimes to see the world as a stage on which we play out characters’.

I intend to use the ‘classical approach to doing a case study’ (Thomas, 2011, p.124) through a triangulation of methods to provide a rounded approach to the research. Whilst I know that the ‘positivist’ approach to research methodology considers that the social world can be studied ‘scientifically’ (May, 2002) with the aim of explaining human behaviour, I believe the topic of the research is more subjective in nature and less open to the objectivity needed in any positivistic approach.

In order to aid the process of interpretation at the various stages of investigation, I have kept a research journal to help capture the process of my journey throughout the research period. I recognise that the process of conducting the research is not linear but an organic one, which is developing all the time as I gain confidence and as my understanding increases and becomes refined. The journal has helped me to capture my progress and growth throughout the research journey, whilst at the same time allowing me to maintain a process of critical reflection.

The interpretative nature of the inquiry has helped me gain a greater understanding of the subject area being investigated. Thomas (2011) states that the interpretive approach assumes an ‘in-depth understanding and deep immersion in the environment of the subject.... with a rich, intensive

understanding' (2011, p 124). It is this multifaceted nature of the research which has given me a greater insight into the research process, the findings and their interpretation, especially as:

'Interpretative researchers assume that the social world is indivisible. It is complex and we should study it in its completeness. In this sense, interpretative research marries easily with case study, which also prioritises looking at the whole' (Thomas, 2011, p. 126).

The 'documentary method of interpretation' (May, 2002, p. 41) helps to track the common threads in the research itself which, in turn, has facilitated the development of my unique discourse to create a specific framework of paradigmatic assumptions (Grix, 2004, p.25) as ideal types or typologies in bringing the research strategy and design together.

#### **4.10 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability**

When using a case study method reliability and validity are not a 'principal concern' (Thomas, 2011, p.62). Thomas argues that reliability is derived from psychometrics. Similarly, validity is concerned to establish what has been 'pre-determined' in the research – 'to find what it intends to find' (p.63). Case study research, on the other hand, is concerned with explorative or interpretative research, with a more open approach in which there are few expectations in respect of the likely research findings. Emphasis on reliability and validity according to Thomas (2011), springs from 'an obsession with findings criteria' (p.63). This is particularly important to understand where there are elements of quantitative research data included within the research method. The

temptation to extend such data to turn an interpretative paradigm into a positivist one by searching for definitive criteria upon which to 'hang' interpretive findings needs to be avoided. Research formulation through 'triangulation' (Bryman, 2008) is the antidote to this danger, since it restores the principle of establishing intelligibility by means of an examination which looks from different directions and uses different methods (Thomas, 2011, p.68). Notwithstanding Thomas's (2011) opinions, interpretative conclusions need to demonstrate, through the arguments advanced, the data findings and evaluative analysis, sound reasoning which can be validated by independent review.

Where new measures are proposed derived from an evaluation of the research findings, Bryman (2008) states that it is necessary to establish at the very minimum a 'face validity' (p.152). This involves a process which invites other people (experts in their field) to 'act as judges to determine whether on the face of it the measure seems to reflect the concept concerned' (p.152). Following the pilot study an exercise of this nature, in the form of a controlled peer group review, was undertaken in order to verify the findings emerging from the IGWP ( e.g. 'instructive' and 'expressive' dialogue).

The issue of generalizability remains valid for case study research. It rests, according to Thomas (2011) on the 'analytical frame' (p.17), which provides the purpose and direction for the research. More particularly, Thomas (2011) points to the process of 'induction' (p.17) as distinct from generalization, through which core principles are derived on the basis of many observations gathered from experience from which it is possible to build a theory or model. Where the



investigation involves quantitative research and evaluation, it is based on ensuring that the sample is representative 'in order to be able to say the results are not unique to the particular group upon whom the research was conducted; in other words, we want to be able to generalize the findings beyond the case (for example, the people) that make up the sample' (Bryman, 2008, p.156). Within the research the four settings when some way to enabling this 'representative' sample to be realised.

#### **4.11 Concluding Comments**

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the approach taken and key considerations given to the research design and the strategy adopted in the methodology. I have emphasised how important my perspective is, as the primary researcher in undertaking the research in the first instance, particularly in regard to what has influenced the research design and strategy. I have confirmed that the triangulation design using the PAR approach was a key element through which to empower children and young people's participation in the research in terms of the questions to be posed, the characteristics of the participants, the methods used and the ethical framework adopted for the IGWP. I have asserted my view that the case study approach represents an ideal strategy form for exploring the views and experiences of young citizens within a number of varying and distinct case study settings in the Birmingham catchment area. I have shown how the literature and policy agenda has informed my understanding of research knowledge and the importance of involving children and young people in the research process and design. To this end, in compiling the research questions, I have set out a research design to elicit answers by

means of a data collecting processes that include an IGWP, semi-structured interviews and organisational questionnaires. I have also highlighted the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches and how these have influenced my interpretive perspective.

In the next chapter, I will be more specific about advancing the research methodology in its actual and practical application in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the key elements to the research, especially in regard to the research processes and related ethical considerations. I will outline the particulars of each case study setting and describe the finer points of the preparatory work undertaken before the actual fieldwork began.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ADVANCING THE METHODOLOGY THROUGH APPLICATION**

*“Ethical issues cannot be ignored as they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved” (Bryman, 2008, p.113).*

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I have set out the steps taken to develop the most appropriate form of methodology and research design, which would enable me to carry out a detailed fieldwork investigation study to examine the experiences and opportunities that children and young people have to participate in decisions that affect their lives, as well as to look at their capacities to engage with these processes. This exploratory exercise led me to conclude that the most appropriate form of study was to utilise a case study strategy incorporating a ‘triangulation methodology’ to be conducted in a number of case study locations, which would facilitate the following forms of data collection:

1. Questionnaire survey data
2. Semi-structured interview data
3. Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP) analysis data
4. Organisational literature data

The aim of the data collection was to gain new insights in the following key investigation areas:

1. to gain a greater understanding of the lives of children and young people specifically in relation to their experiences and opportunities of being 'listened to' and 'engaged with' by adults, within the different contexts in which they function as young citizens – the case study organisation, the community setting, and in their leisure/ social lives
2. to investigate the capacities of children and young people to engage effectively in the participation processes
3. to explore the views, attitudes and skills of adults involved in participation and engagement agenda with children and young people

In terms of my own design considerations, in seeking to establish an effective platform for conducting the fieldwork programme, I created a two pronged approach. The primary approach related to the IGWP being undertaken directly with children and young people, which I wanted to ensure was actually creative in nature, and had a less 'boring' feel to it, so that children could feel relaxed in an environment where they could share their views and experiences of their realities without any hindrances or concerns. The second approach involved having adults provide their views and opinions through either a semi-structured interview process or through an anonymous questionnaire, to be distributed to all staff employed or volunteering for the participating case study organisation.

In this Chapter, I will set out and examine how the adopted methodology has been further advanced, through the practical considerations and applications

necessary to undertake the research.

## **5.2 Contributions by Children and Young People – Early Relationships**

The opportunity to conduct an initial explanatory information gathering session with a small group of children and young people helped to reinforce the need to reflect carefully on the input and contributions that they might make. I was conscious that without it there could otherwise be a potential for a form of exploitation or in some way manipulating or influencing what young citizens had to say in relation to their experiences of being involved in participation and the decision making process. I was also particularly aware of the need to guard against being *tokenistic* (Hart, 2002) in my approach. It was critical that I conduct the research with an openness and appreciation for what the young citizens could contribute. I recognised that there can be a tendency to see children and young people as passive observers or, even worse, as victims in the research process, which brings with it the danger of concentrating on what they lack, rather than seeing them for what they actually bring to the exercise and to value what they are sharing. This danger might result, for example, in the research failing to make adequate use of the experiences and perceptions being presented. As part of the participatory approach, there is an integral mechanism within the research methodology, which includes for the young citizen participants being able to highlight aspects which they feel are important to them. This also supports the need to create a means through which it is possible to empower children and young people as equal citizens with the right to make contributions and to express their views. Always with the aim of helping to more fully understand the extent and reality of their experiences.

As I have already inferred, an important aspect of the field work was to ensure that the children and young people were actively involved as an integral part of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process. It was therefore, essential that the young citizens did not simply participate in a passive way in the IGWP. The problem of passivity is that it has the danger of leading to the dominant involvement and contribution of only a small number of the group, while potentially leaving out others, especially the less confident individuals. This can be very detrimental to the research process as well as potentially creating inequality, it can also skew the outcomes. It was necessary, therefore, to ensure that any of the participants who were unsure about being involved in the research were made to feel confident enough to be able to express their views and to participate at a pace which suited them throughout the process, or to withdraw.

During the pilot study, it became necessary, at one point, for me to discuss with the head teacher the difficulties I was experiencing with four of the pupils, who were dominating and disrupting the activities. His immediate response was to withdraw these pupils from the research process itself. Indeed, he wanted to insist that these individuals should be taken out of the research and sent to other classrooms. Since I was endeavouring to make provision for all types of respondents in my field work study, I felt uncomfortable with this option. It was essential, in my view, to value all contributions, even of disruptive pupils, despite the difficulties it caused in managing the group work activities. I could see that withdrawal was not the appropriate action to take as these pupils also needed to have their voices heard (Cheminais, 2008, pp.4-14) within the research study, if at all possible. Believing this matter could be dealt with by further advancing the

engagement process, I made the decision, that in the next group work activity these four pupils would be assigned a leadership role. Accordingly, they were given responsibility for maintaining order and ensuring that the agreed ground rules, which had been established at the beginning of the research period, were complied with. This approach proved to be successful.

In order to ensure good pupil participation, it is essential to have an authentic involvement approach, which is sensitive and inclusive in nature, and that observes key ethical considerations and accountabilities. I was conscious, therefore, of the need to avoid actions that embody the ‘adultism’ failures that Bell (1995) identifies, which can diminish or fail to recognise the contributions or ‘voice’ of young citizens in the participation process. However, I was also aware that there are many different levels of involvement (Hart, 1992a, 1992, 1997, Bovaird & Löffler, 2009, Christensen & James, 2000) or forms of engagement that could be made when appealing to young citizens in the participation process, and not all were necessarily possible. It was important, therefore, to take account of the different levels of participation that were appropriate in designing the PAR IGWP, and to continue to be conscious of these issues during the planning and execution stages of the programme. As well as seeking to avoid a tokenistic or manipulative engagement (Hart, 2002), I was particularly aiming to locate my participation design at Hart’s model level 4 – ‘assigned and informed’ in many of the exercises. The higher rungs on the ladder represent a greater level of engagement and involvement (Cheminais, 2008). I have, however, sought to enable, in the various parts of the participation activities, the opportunity for ‘child initiated’ (rung 7) element to emerge. Fundamentally, Hart’s ladder offers a

practical tool and means of assessing the degree of participation that is taking place. There is also no impediment in being able to jump between rungs on the ladder, according to the nature of the participant's engagement activity, since the ladder does not have to be 'followed sequentially or incrementally' (Cheminais, 2008, p.11). In practice, I recognised that there was a degree of progression that was helpful in advancing the participatory process, depending upon the activity being undertaken. It is clear, that participatory research forms, according to Bennett and Roberts (2004, p.8), are seen as 'different from human monistic or co-operative enquiries in which genuine exchange on a personal level is emphasised as a central element of the process'. In seeking to ensure that the participants themselves had an opportunity to influence the way the programme was delivered and how the activities were timetabled, the design required that the children and young people take responsibility for writing the ground rules, for determining the role play and for planning, delivering and evaluating the final session.

Although the participants were not involved in the semi-structured interview process or in the questionnaires circulated to staff members, I did develop the particular questions as a result of the feedback that emerged as part of the exploratory information gathering session, which was conducted with a group of young citizens. I was also conscious to ensure that in the pilot study, the head teacher, whilst being an integral part of the process as the key gate-keeper, did not have a central part to play in the IGWP, because of the intrinsic power relationship that exists within the school environment. Similarly, I was concerned to ensure that the class teacher and the teaching assistant, who were required to



help with supporting the delivery of the group work, did so with minimal input. Together, however, I was able to achieve a formula in which the key gatekeepers, including the head teacher, class teacher and teaching assistant, were seen as an integral part of the research process from the beginning to the end. This was achieved by means of the open dialogue and feedback, which was maintained throughout the fieldwork process and was particularly important because of the need to work within a strong ethical framework that included issues of safeguarding. Subsequently, this same approach was utilised within each of the case study settings.

### **5.3 Relating to Children and Young People**

From the outset it was important for me, as the researcher, to consider what form of participatory approach I should utilise. In doing this, I felt it was important to avoid adopting an 'extractive' (Bennett and Roberts, 2004, p 5) form. In its nature, this form means, according to Bennett and Roberts (2004), that the researcher should try not to use the researched only as a source of information, but rather to create a relationship with the research participants themselves, with a view to giving something back to them in a concrete and positive way. Bennett and Roberts (2004) assert that by not extracting evidence the research becomes a more 'interactive' (p 5) relationship and is seen as part of a more inclusive way of working within the research study.

The application of this aim required a conscious effort throughout the IGWP. It also demanded, I felt, that I become more actively involved in the research process as it developed. For example, I participated in observing the children

and young people directly during their group work activities, whilst at the same time helping to managing the group work tasks. My role also extended at times to helping to aid the understanding of those involved in the research, so that they could keep on-task. In this way, the participant's awareness of my presence became less inhibiting and I was able to record group work discussions in the preparation for feedback in the plenary sessions, which provided a further opportunity to gain a greater insight into the children and young people's thinking. The need to create three groups in the pilot study because of the numbers of pupils involved, did to some degree limit the research data arising from this development, since it was necessary to rely on the teacher and teaching assistant to operate in a similar way. In the event however, the debriefing sessions helped to maintain consistency in this approach. In case study setting 1 and 2 this was, in practice, less of a difficulty because there were much fewer sub-groups created and again it was possible to brief the support adult present in each session. However, in case study setting 3, the youth group, I found myself having to be much more attentive in my observations and was considerably more stretched because of the size of the youth group and the fact that the group work activities needed to be split between two separate rooms.

In addition to the children and young people being able to lead in the participatory group work, I also wanted them to have a part in helping to create elements of the research itself. For example, it was important that they helped to develop their own ground rules (rules, rights and responsibilities in case study setting 1 – 3), the way that they were open to adapt the brief for the role play as it developed and the way in which they took leadership and responsibility for running the final

session. In applying this approach, my objective was to elicit a more rounded and in depth understanding of the participants' perspectives, particularly relating to the decisions they made and the responsibilities they took. In accordance with my ontological perspective, I believed, that the children and young people should be given the opportunity and freedom to be able to express their views and to respond effectively to the programme and their involvement in it, as it progressed through each session. Furthermore, I was keen for them to respond, if they could, to the element of authority, which came with the leadership role. Equally, it was important that I was seen as fully respecting them as 'experts' in their own right. Hence the need to provide a genuine platform for the children and young people, which allowed them to have some control over the way the session was run. In this way, I was conforming to the PAR principles in allowing flexibility and active involvement of the researched in the research itself.

Generating the IGWP timetable in outline only, was a further means by which it was possible to introduce a shared control approach. Whilst needing to establish certain parameters with the host organisation, in order to fit in with their programme constraints, it nevertheless provided flexibility with the group work participants. I set out an agenda and an activity profile for each of the sessions, which included times that might be used for ice breakers and warm up exercises, discussions and debate periods, formal activities and tasks, as well as flexible periods for the children and young people to conduct their own work. Alongside, these provisions, I included a plenary session for presentations and feedback, which included my conducting a 'What Went Well' and 'Even Better' If' feedback evaluations, in order to gauge their immediate views on how the session had

been run and undertaken and to look at any needs for improvement.

In the role play sessions, I took the role of facilitator, to help the children and young people understand about the concept of participation in the context of each role play. In the final session, the children and young people were given full responsibility for planning, leading and evaluating the session. On these occasions, I took the role of gate-keeper, to aid each group deliver the activity and to ensure that health and safety was maintained so that no one got injured. During these sessions the children and young people were able to 'ad-lib' and to take control and exercise authority for executing the session and presenting their activity to the whole group. This was followed by the individual participants completing an evaluation feedback form.

In terms of limitation on the research objective to facilitate joint ownership, it was not possible to arrive at a position where the children and young people had the opportunity to influence and participate in the interpretation of the data collected or have any input into how the information would be used and presented. Similarly, I have not included any of the participatory organisations in the analysis or evaluation process. This is mainly because there was a defined time limit for my involvement with the case study organisations, as agreed with the individual gate-keepers and this covered principally the period for collecting the data. I have, however, agreed to provide each of the participating case study organisations with a summary of the research findings and to meet with each of the gate-keepers to discuss the conclusions that I have drawn from the various exercises. In each of the settings, I have also agreed that I will present the

research findings directly to the children and young people who were involved with the IGWP, if they are still attending the case study organisation when I am ready to make these presentations. Notwithstanding that some of the children and young people may have left the setting, I have also agreed to present my findings to a focus group of children and young people in each setting, if the gatekeepers are willing to allow this. At this moment in time, they have all indicated that this would be an excellent way of feeding back to the young citizens themselves on the findings.

#### **5.4 Ethical Considerations**

In the each of the last two sections, I have made a number of passing reference to the importance of ethical practice, which is fundamental to all research undertaken with children and young people today. Indeed, ethical considerations have dominated research procedures in recent years, with the production of guidelines from different bodies, such as the Economic Research Social Council (ERSC) provisions within University bodies and in the Barnardo's statement of Ethical Research Practice (<http://www.barnardos.org.uk/ethical.pdf> October 2010) to name but a few. As a result, children and young people have, to some extent, come to be seen as a marginalised group, who are often excluded from the research process or not fully directly included in research which involves their participation, because of the tighter ethical requirements surrounding the important yet, in many ways, restrictive issues of safeguarding. This can be accentuated where problems arise from the way some adults still consider that working with young citizens can add unpredictability to the research process. Clearly, it is vital that the researcher give additional design attention to how

specific material is presented and how any questions are raised, as they need to be posed in an effective manner and take account of a child's or young person's level of understanding (Gillick competency - *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbeck AHA*, [1986] AC112). This is particularly important in respect to the matters of consent, the conceptual framework and in the use of research language. Putting the core ethical principles into practice can be challenging and lead to misunderstandings if the researcher does not take care to be explicit about the instruments of research and the process it involves.

The ethical considerations for conducting the research and working directly with children and young people are of paramount importance (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009 pp.11-29, Robson, 2005, pp.70-71, Bryman, 2008, pp.118-124). In preparing the pilot and case study investigations it was necessary, therefore, to hold discussions with the Birmingham City Council's ethical officer and to complete their research ethical form (Appendix 1), which included a consent form and a detailed description of the field work. In addition to this process, I was also required to comply with the University's own ethical standards. Throughout this process, a number of revisions to the field work proposals took place prior to the commencement of the field work case study programmes, including the strategy for ensuring the maintenance of confidentiality. The main gate-keepers in each of the participating organisations were required to sign the consent form, and were given full details about their ability to withdraw from the research. They were also given full written documents and information describing the research, its processes and objectives. The details of the interactive programme and the key elements of the research itself were set out in order to ensure that they were fully

transparent. I also spoke to them about the provisions for the case study organisation to withdraw. Finally, the gate-keepers were given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify any issues on the research. Each organisation was given a folder containing the research outline, which included providing evidence of who I was as well as information on my background. In this document, I was able to affirm that I had met the ethical requirements of the University and the City Council.

In order to maintain confidential records, the case study data has been colour coded to a particular case study organisation using a numbering system and organisational descriptors, which excludes organisational and respondents' names. Each of the participating organisations were also given guidelines for setting out how the IGWP implementation was to be led, along with details of my role as the researcher, the outline timetable and details for each person who would be needed to be involved as part of the research support team within the organisational setting.

Due to the potential vulnerability of the participants, particularly the children and young people themselves, it was important that I demonstrated an ability to maintain adherence to safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures within the City Council's processes. The Birmingham City Council's ethical officer worked closely with me to achieve this objective during the ethical approval stages. He also closely monitored my approach to ethical considerations and required that I inform all of the organisational gate-keepers of the duty to comply with the procedures. During this process, I benefited from being able to refer to a

current OFSTED enhanced Criminal Records Bureau certificate and the fact that I was registered with the General Social Care Council as a practicing social worker and had certificates of registration, giving me a license to practice. Both these documents provided credence and affirmed my ability to be a safe practitioner. Notwithstanding these supportive practice measures, I was confident of my ability, skills and experience to demonstrate sound ethical compliance and safeguarding measures.

It is essential, if full participation is to be achieved, that the researcher takes active steps to ensure that the research environment is safe for everyone. This means not only having regard to child protection principles and ethical compliance under safeguarding, but also in all matters of health and safety and in having an awareness of the potential in which situations of vulnerability for anyone involved in the research process might emerge. Consequently, I included details in the information packs provided to help the participating organisations address these issues, which were considered at the outset and during the course of the fieldwork research stages.

As part of the IGWP research process itself, which was to be undertaken directly with children and young people, I insisted that the gate-keepers for the organisational participating case study settings ensure that I had a member of staff employed by the organisation actively involved with my work with the children and young people in the delivery of the IGWP. The requirements set out a need for robust safeguarding criteria, since I did not want to jeopardise the children and young people's safety, or to place myself in a position where I could



be vulnerable by not having a second adult present at all times. The added bonus to having at least one other adult involved helped to ensure, as far as possible, my neutrality in the research process and gave me more opportunity to observe the interactions between the participants as they were undertaking the tasks.

It is very important and essential in any research of this kind, that the researcher clearly sets out with the participants what the purpose of the research is, and what its outcome can or cannot do. To this end, the requirement to obtain informed consent is fundamental, as participants must have an understanding of what the research is about and what it is that they are committing themselves to. In order to fulfil these obligations, I made provision for participants to have the opportunity to ask questions and seek points of clarification at the initial and induction stages of the research process. I also enabled the participating case study organisations to understand their right to withdraw at any stage. In this regard, it was necessary to place a responsibility on them to inform me if this was going to be the case. Finally, I spoke at length with each of the gate-keepers during the IGWP sessions about the way the group work activities were going, so that they could keep up to date and be informed if any difficulties became evident.

## **5.5 Permissions**

Establishing clear protocols for obtaining and maintaining the correct form of organisation and individual participant's permissions, as well as being an essential component of the ethical requirements, was also an important factor in the design of the study, since it created a distinct need to provide a specific

presentational component. Prior to any work beginning with each of the organisations selected to take part in the field work, it was necessary in the first instance to confirm who was going to be designated as the organisation's gate-keeper and to establish that the jurisdiction was in place for conducting the research. Within the procedures established, it was the gate-keeper's duty to sign the consent form on behalf of the participating organisation.

With the exception of the pilot study, at the beginning of the research case study implementation, I provided an introductory fact-giving information session (Appendix 2), at which all of the children and young people who were to be involved were invited. At this meeting, I was able to provide them with information about the research in order that they could decide whether they wanted to be involved in the research or not, and in order to fulfil the following programme objectives:

1. to empower the children and young people
2. to fully inform them and explain the process
3. to enhance and give them the opportunity to ask questions and seek points of clarification

In undertaking this exercise, I needed to ensure that my use of language was both sensitive and appropriate to the needs of the children and young people themselves, without being overly technical or ambiguous. To aid in this exercise, I created an attractive PowerPoint presentation, together with a colourful information leaflet specifically for the children and young people to retain (Appendix 2 and 3). In addition, I also set out a detailed consent letter (Appendix

1, pp.38 - 41). In the design and development of these resources, I was careful to ensure that for each organisation the information was tailor-made for their particular group, thus avoiding a generic form that could be construed as impersonal. I placed particular emphasis on the information leaflet, since it was going to be retained by the participants and potentially referred back to at various stages as the group work sessions progressed. Accordingly, I was conscious to make the documentation as clear as possible and to be presented in a form which would be inspiring. The use of larger colourful text, graphics, images and 'punchy' narrative helped to create a positive impression of my key aims and objectives.

At the time of the pilot study, I placed the consent permissions for children and young people with the head teacher and class teacher to obtain as part of their role as gate-keepers. Afterwards, in my reflection, I believe that I should have sought direct permission from the pupils. I was concerned that the pupils may have been less able to make a definitive choice to participate or not due to the existing authority which the head teacher and class teacher held. During the IGWP, I undertook an activity which looked specifically at the right to withdraw their issues of consent. I subsequently made changes within the case studies programmes to introduce, as part of the first introductory meetings, an explanation on the importance of rights and permission. In doing this, I agreed with the view of Mayall (2002) that 'it is not that we should base the argument for children's rights on the fact that they carry responsibilities; it is that recognition of their responsibilities may help raise their status, and thence provide an arena for serious consideration of their rights' (p2).

In many ways, I was surprised at just how much time was needed to obtain the various case study organisation agreements. It involved a full and detailed explanation to the gate-keepers so that they could properly understand what kind of research I was seeking to undertake, what the methods I was looking to deploy were, what impact it was likely to have, and what time frame would be placed on their organisation. In support of this enterprise, I produced guidelines for implementation to define the purpose of the research and the processes and activities included in it, so that these could be handed out directly to the organisations' gate-keepers. The objective being to ensure that they had a full understanding of what to expect, how to address issues and how to withdraw should they need to. I also talked through with the organisational gate-keepers the timetabling expectations, the organisational logistics for the interactive group work activities and to identify the key individuals who could provide the semi-structured interviews. In addition, I detailed the support that would be needed to compile the staff questionnaire forms for distribution, completion and return via an administrative system within the case study settings.

In my preparations I had to anticipate possible tensions, as well as an often general lack of interest or perceived value in the research on the part of some of the potential host organisations. Indeed, I held initial discussions with a total of 15 organisations from across the West and East Midlands area and one organisation in South Wales in my endeavours to seek their involvement in the research. These organisations spanned the public, voluntary and independent sectors, all of which proved to be challenging in many different ways. For example, there were many reasons why assistance could not be provided such

as funding arrangements, time-scales, staffing, lack of response following initial agreement, curriculum and time-tabling issues as well as organisational mentality and attitudes towards the research topic area.

As previously identified, I was eventually successful in gaining the active support of the following three organisations - a voluntary aided statutory sector school (pilot study), a Looked After Children's Service, statutory sector (case study setting 1 - LAC/RoC), an Independent Private sector school (case study setting 2 - IGS) and a Youth Group Charity from the third Sector (case study setting 3 - MMYG). Despite a great deal of effort to meet with a large number of organisations, I was unable to gain agreement to follow the research through in any more than the four organisations listed. These setbacks, however, did enable me to see how important it was for my documentation to be professionally and clearly set out in ways which were immediately transparent. As a consequence of these difficulties, the research was limited insofar as I was only able to conduct the fieldwork with organisations within the Birmingham area. On the other hand, this also had (unintended) advantages. For example, I was able to use my familiarity with the area and my geographical understanding of the City to identify relevant organisations to participate. I was also able to utilise my professional networks in the City to promote participation and to obtain the eventual agreement of the four participating organisations. Moreover, the fact that all four organisations were within the same city, meant that the local policy and ethical context was identical for all. Consequently, I did not need to make allowances for differences in policies between local authorities, local educational authorities, the local cultures of the schools system and the local arrangements

for third sector involvement in children and young people's services.

### **5.6 Role of the Gate-Keeper**

During the pilot study (January to July 2009), one of my additional aims was to develop an approach which helped to raise awareness of the increasing emphasis on the participatory agenda and its potential positive impact on the life of school. This, I felt, gave more credibility within the school context and helped to secure the head teacher's continued enthusiasm. In order to demonstrate these claims, it was therefore important that I provide examples of what would be contained in the IGWP during the initiation and induction stages. I felt it was necessary to 'wet' the head teacher's appetite in the way in which I described the type of things I was going to cover, as well as the benefits to the school that undertaking the research would bring. Following on from these meeting, it was subsequently necessary to continue to liaise closely with the head teacher and to keep him fully informed throughout the research process as each of the four group work session stages, the adult questionnaires and the interview processes, were completed. There was a requirement under the ethical procedures that I had established that the issue of 'informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality' (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, p.14) were in place. I also had a desire to allow the head teacher to have some control over the research process itself and to enable him, as gate-keeper, to participate and maintain an interested involvement throughout the research study (Evans and Fisher, 1999).

### **5.7 Positive 'Spin-offs' Created by the Research**

An important element of conducting the research in the case study organisational

settings was the significance placed on the benefits arising from the nature of the research, both in terms of the adults and for the young citizens involved. The exchanges between the researcher and different actors in the pilot and case studies have proven to raise awareness in the participating organisations. This was particularly evident in respect of the key principles that children and young people had a voice and had a right to have the opportunity to express their views, opinions, thoughts and ideas, in the decisions that affect them and that this was an important matter to test. During the research, I wanted to raise awareness of the need to empower the children and young people so as to help them define their experiences. Equally, the methodology design sought to reinforce their value as young citizens in a way that respected their rights, and in a manner which was part of an inclusive approach recognising them as full social partners. To this end, emphasis was placed on an understanding of how young citizens are part of a 'more open and democratic process of knowledge production' (Brock and McGee, 2002, p.20), which Rayner (2003) asserts is an arena that sees children as 'not the people of tomorrow, but people of today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with courtesy and respect, as equals. They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be' (2003, p.67).

The claim of participatory research to further an empowerment agenda rests on its focus on 'knowledge, action and consciousness and their role in catalysing processes of social change and challenges to democratic relations of power' (Brock and McGee, 2002, p.8). Thus, the participatory research school confronts both the full range of epistemological questions and provides a critique.

The participatory research approach is seen by Brock and McGee (2002) as three interlocking co-evaluating components of knowledge, action and consciousness (p.8). These three elements offer a useful framework when considering children and young people's participation in the diverse challenges which arise when conducting research with this group of participants. The three elements relate as follows:

- **Knowledge** – requires having an awareness of the participants' expertise and providing a platform, which gives credence to their local knowledge and shapes how it is 'framed and given voice' (Brock and McGee, 2002, p. 8), rather than simply providing a stylised account of what the children and young people's perspectives are, based on an adult's understanding. The need to be mindful of the formation, framing and construction of knowledge is vital as a researcher.
- **Action** - the participants' expertise is viewed by Brock and McGee (2002) as being embodied in the process of 'social change or problem solving are inseparable from the idea of action' (p.9). This means that developing an understanding of the context is critical – it situates action and understanding of what might limit that action, for example, trade offs between different domains of action and limited resources to conduct research in the first place. This was a particular dilemma for me as I did not wish to raise greater expectations of the children and young people, which the gate-keepers would not have been able to support at the close of the research process following my departure.



- **Consciousness** - is seen as challenging existing power relations, as a critical aspect of awareness. Brock and McGee (2002) see this as among the most neglected elements of participatory research approaches. Developing a critical consciousness is important as it can provoke changes in vision and practice delivery.

The delivery of the IGWP, which was principally designed to embody the PAR approach of engaging directly with the children and young people, has, I believe, helped each case study organisation to acquire an enhanced understanding of why young citizens involvement is significant to them as an organisation, whilst also enabling it to meet its responsibility for addressing the UNCRC (1989). The research has provided the opportunity for the organisations to re-evaluate where their organisation is in addressing the participation and inclusion agenda. This has been, in my view, a catalyst for improvement and for further changes within each of the case study settings, as it has helped to improve 'organisational knowledge, practitioner knowledge and user knowledge' (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, p.200). As a by-product of the research, this has therefore helped to create organisational learning and to shape '*evidence-influenced practice*' (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, p.200).

There has also been spin-offs from the research for the children and young people themselves as individuals, such as having a more improved and informed understanding of their rights, extending their knowledge base, enhancing and creating a better skill base, aiding their identity and in personal and social development that has increased their confidence. The design of the IGWP was

intended to provide each participant with the opportunity to develop their problem solving skills, communication skills, co-operation and negotiation skills, creative skills, presentational, writing and drawing skills. The outcome of these forms of pedagogies where children and young people are learning from experiences (David et al, 2010, p.10, Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009, p.156) has had a positive affect on them. Although this has not been evaluated in this study, my discussions with the gate-keeper involved in the case study settings suggests that the research process itself has opened up the development of organisational practices and pedagogies, which will lead to greater forms of engagement with the children and young people in a more inclusive and meaningful way in the future.

## **5.8 Data Collection**

During the research analysis process I sought to improve my understanding of and gain more insights into what children and young people were saying, regarding their experiences of being listened to and participating in the decision making process within the case study organisational settings. It was therefore particularly important to be able to take account of the nuances in the data collected initially from the pilot study and then from the main case study settings, when analysing and interpreting the findings. It was essential, in the data collection processes across the multiple methods of investigation, i.e., the IGWP, the staff questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews, were not seen as a bolt-on but an integral part of the research investigation process. This enables the deeper meaning within both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, which gave rise to the key findings, to be captured.

One element of the participatory research process stresses the need to identify the interconnectedness between different data sets. Whilst all of the data had to be analysed and interpreted separately from their raw form into more aggregated forms, to provide a basis for interpretation, it was important that the implications arising from each of these separate data sets should be compared and contrasted, in order to add robustness to my interpretation of the findings. This is where the process of triangulation adds value to the research study.

### **5.9 Remuneration**

Finally, it is important to note that no payment was made for undertaking the research in any of the participating organisations, nor was there any payment given to the children and young people or adults involved. However, at the end of the pilot study, I did provide the whole class with a tin of sweets, when I presented them with their certificates. I wanted to personally thank the pupils for their involvement and to show some appreciation for giving up their time and sharing their views with me. The tin of sweets was only an indulgent treat as a symbolic gesture of thanks. Likewise, it was important to show some appreciation to the organisation's personnel who supported me during the research. I therefore gave the head teacher, the teaching assistant, the class teacher and the school secretary each a small box of chocolates to express gratitude for their support.

At the end of the main case study activities, I also provided each child or young person with the following small individual gifts:

- In case study setting 1 - the Looked after Children (LAC/RoC), I provided a small Christmas gift at the celebratory party session. I also wrote a thank you letter to the head of service to express my appreciation for undertaking the research within the LAC service area.
- In case study setting 2 - the Independent Girl's School (IGS), I provided each of the pupils with a bar of chocolate and gave the class teacher a bouquet of flowers. In addition, I also wrote to the school's head teacher to thank the organisation for participating.
- In case study setting 3 - the Boys Youth Group (BYG), I provided an individual 'goody-bag' of sweets at the celebratory party event. Finally, I also provided the youth group leader with a small donation to be added to the youth group fundraising 'kitty'.

### **5.10 Concluding Comments**

In this chapter, I have discussed the various key components associated with the practical application for undertaking and conducting research. In addition, I have drawn attention to the fundamental principles of ethical considerations specifically related to working with children and young people. I have highlighted why it is important, as the researcher, to avoid an extractive form of PAR in favour of a more contributory aspect of the research in respect to young citizens involvement. I have discussed the importance of the role of the gate-keeper and the collaborative approach both from the host organisation and the participants.

Chapter 6, will detail the pilot study investigation research that was conducted prior to the main fieldwork study. This chapter will provide an insight into all elements of the research design applied to the pilot study investigation.

## CHAPTER 6

### PILOT STUDY

*John (2003) states as understanding more fully that participatory education alone is “not a management technique, but rather a socially embedded power sharing” (p.224) activity.*

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I set out the various factors and considerations that helped me formulate a methodology and its application which would aid me in undertaking the fieldwork research. In this chapter, I will set out the pilot study investigation findings. This study was undertaken within a single organisational school setting with a focus group that comprised of a class of 30, Years 6 pupils. Because of the large number of pupils the class was divided into three groups when undertaking the Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP) sessions. As a consequence, the single pilot study took on a broader investigation platform and as a result produced a significant amount of data.

In order to provide a full record and account of the pilot study in action, I have set out within Appendix 4 a detailed stage by stage chronology in the form of a narrative to describe the actions, processes, feelings, thoughts and evaluation assessments that emerged as the various sessions were undertaken. Whilst this record includes the data collected and a degree of analysis, in this Chapter, I will present the main findings alongside a summary of the exercises undertaken based on the objectives that were originally envisaged. They will also draw on the unexpected outcomes which emerged from the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodological approach that was adopted.

## 6.2 Pilot Study Approach

The process of conducting a pilot study can involve a trial run or 'dress rehearsal' (Yin, 2003b p.79) for the main case study fieldwork. This allows for the opportunity to explore ideas, research techniques and methods 'without tears' (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2002, p.135) by gathering evidence and information, which can be tested to see how they might work in practice.

The pilot study that I choose to implement involved working with a class of 30, Year 6 pupils divided into three groups of 10. Together with the IGWP, it included conducting three semi-structured interviews and obtaining 'self-completion questionnaire' (Bryman, 2008, p. 247) replies from the adults who work or who are volunteers within the school setting. Roberts-Holmes (2008, p. 35) captures this process quite well in the following illustration.

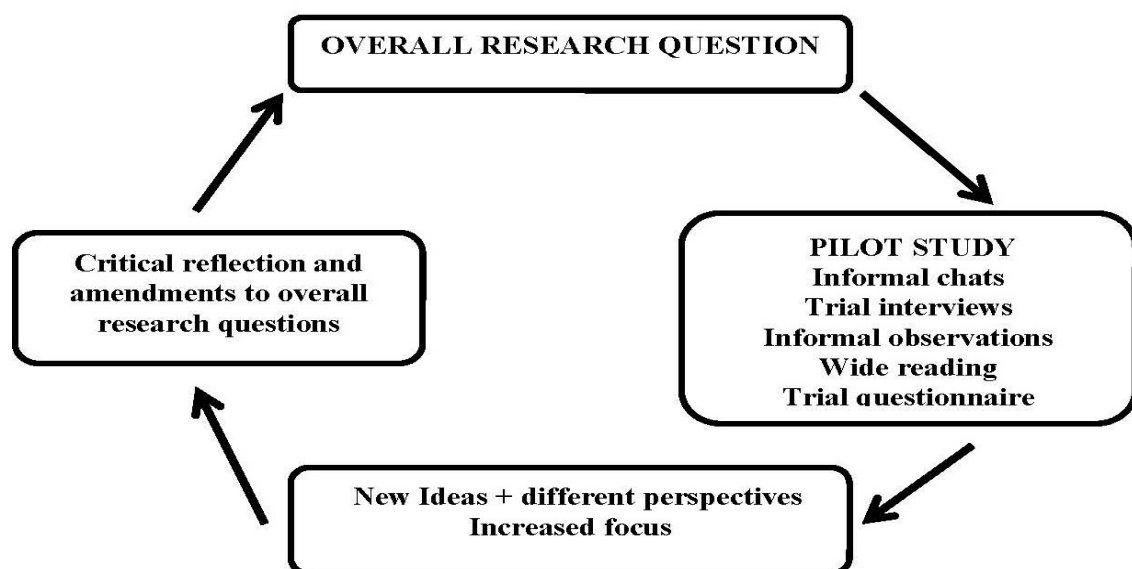


Figure 6.1 - Diagram to show the relationship between the overall research questions and the pilot study by Roberts-Holmes (2008, p. 35).

From the outset, I felt that there was a real advantage in undertaking a pilot study at the beginning of the research process, since it would aid in understanding

whether the chosen research questions, approaches and proposed methods were sufficiently 'specific, ethical and actually doable' (Roberts-Holmes, 2008, p. 35). Piloting also has the benefit of ensure that the 'research instrument as a whole functions well' (Bryman, 2008, p.247). It is interesting to note that Yin (2003b) suggests that the pilot study is the 'final preparation for data collection' (pp.78-80) but is not a 'pre-test'. Yin (2003b) asserts that the pilot study may be 'unrelated to the criteria of selecting the final cases in the case study design' (p.79). This may be because the pilot study represents a more 'complicated case, as compared with the likely real cases' (p.79). A pilot study can significantly aid the researcher in refining ideas and in assessing and developing the data collection processes with respect to both the 'content of the data and the procedures to be followed' (Yin, 2003b p.79).

Undertaking the pilot study has helped enormously in my own research study. I have been able to reflect critically on the methodology deployed for conducting the research and in looking in much more detail at my research topic area, questions and planning. This was particularly true in relation to determining the adequacy of the questions for the semi-structured interviews and in relation to the self-completing questionnaire. It was particular important to test out how well the questions in both situations had been understood and flowed, as well as in looking at how the format for presenting them to respondents had been received. In these areas the pilot study was very informative and helped me assess the relevant line of questioning needed, and in how best I might facilitate accessing organisations to conduct the case study research itself. The pilot study is viewed by Yin (2003b) as very important and may require more resources committed to



this phase of the research process than to the actual case studies themselves in order to more fully examine all of the issues as thoroughly as can be achieved. Certainly, this proved to be true to the experience that emerged with my pilot study enterprise.

### **6.3 Implementation Strategy**

In implementing the pilot study the following stages were undertake:

#### **6.3.1 Selecting the Organisation**

This process included three steps in order identify the various research potential pilot study organisational settings, to evaluate their ability to participate and to make a final selection.

**Step 1** – Identification of potential organisational settings, for which an IGWP would be suitable. This was achieved by a combination of reviewing established network links and conducting an internet search. As a result, I was able to identify three possible organisations, one of which subsequently became the chosen pilot study organisation.

**Step 2** – Evaluation of potential participating organisations. In order to achieve this it was necessary to review the various organisations capacity to meet the research age range profile for the young citizens, their ability to operate within the timescale set for the study, their capacity to be able to accommodate the IGWP and to identify key individuals who could aid in the study and provide semi-structured interviews. This operation required a number of individual meetings

with the three organisations.

**Step 3** – Final selection. Having evaluated the three organisation, I established that they were all suitable to be considered for the pilot study and also potentially for the subsequent main case study. The final selection, however, was ultimately determined by the fact that two of the organisations were unable to proceed due to their own organisational constraints.

### **6.3.2 Progressing the Study with the Key Gate-Keeper and Support Team**

Following the selection of the pilot study organisation, the next stage was to set up a number of briefing meetings. From the outset, it was important to establish and foster an enthusiastic and professional relationship with the organisations key gate-keeper, which for the pilot study organisation was the head teacher. This support ultimately ensured that the whole staff team co-operated with the completion of the questionnaires and maintained the commitment of the support staff who aided in the IGWP sessions. To this extent, it is clear that a collaborative approach to the investigation was critical to its success. For example, the initial meeting with the class teacher introduced an endorsement to the time frame for working with the pupils and for the establishment for setting out the practical arrangements. One, key practical issue was related to managing the large class numbers. In consideration of this issue, the knowledge base of the class teacher helped to ensure that the division of the class into three groups of ten pupils was done in an effective, inclusive and diverse way. These meetings also enabled matters relating to health and safety, ethic, environment and time-tabling to be reviewed ahead of the IGWP activities being undertaken.

### 6.3.3 Meeting the Pupils

At the request of the organisation, an initial impromptu introductory meeting took place with the pupils, in order that I could introduce myself as the researcher, as well as the purpose of the study and the manner in which it would be undertaken. This experience, led me to incorporate a planned session within the case study programme, as I believe it to be an important aspect of the research process.

When subsequently I met with the pupils to start the IGWP, I was able to provide a more detailed outline of the actual programme and processes that would be followed and to speak about the form of the activities that would be undertaken in each of the sessions, their time-tabling, as well as to underline the freedom that I wanted them to express in their participation and evaluation input. To this end, I provided a purpose designed information leaflet that set out the key objectives and reasons for the research. I also presented a PowerPoint Session Plan, which provided a pictorial illustration of the various activities (see Appendix 2).

Central to this communication was the need to foster an atmosphere, which would both excite the pupils and facilitate their active co-operation. Being able to answer their questions and to allay any fears or uncertainties was very important, since the primary aim of the study was to elicit their views and hear their voice. In support of this aim it was fundamental that the children and young people affirm their consent, which was also an implicit requirement of the research ethical criteria. Whilst this was managed as part of the head teacher's gate-keeper role and the opportunity to withdraw fully explained, I nonetheless, felt that this process needed to be further developed in the main case study so that more

prominence was given to it as an important principle of the participation agenda. I ended the session with an overview of the contents of the programme, which was set out in a matrix format (See Appendix 2).

#### **6.3.4 My Approach as the Researcher**

From the outset, I was mindful that my role ought to be seen as independent to the role of the teacher and classroom assistant, since I was conscious to avoid any potential for limiting the engagement process as a result of a possible perceived teacher-pupil power relationship. Accordingly, I was of the view that my approach would help the pupils share more of their ideas and engage with the various participatory tasks, if I took a 'progressive' (Bennett, 1976, p. 38) teaching style approach rather than a 'traditional' (Bennett, 1976, p.38) approach (see Table 6.1 below). Bennett (1976) examines at length the teaching styles of teachers in his book *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress*. He particularly discusses whether a teacher's style and approach actually makes a difference to pupil outcomes in terms of 'pupil growth or pupil change' (p.17). What Bennett asserts is that the more indirect or less hostile the teacher's behaviour is the more conducive is the growth of the pupils. Such an approach, he feels, is also more likely to generate better outcomes where the teaching style is 'indirect', since in such cases the 'teaching behaviours appears to generate more positive attitudes' in pupils (Bennett, 1976, p.22).

<b>Bennett's (1976) Characteristics of Teaching Styles</b>			
<b>Progressive</b>		<b>Traditional</b>	
1	Integrated subject matter	1	Separate subject matter
2	Teacher as guide to educational experiences	2	Teacher as distributor of knowledge
3	Active pupil role	3	Passive pupil role
4	Pupils participate in curriculum planning	4	Pupils have no say in curriculum planning
5	Learning predominantly by discovery techniques	5	Accent on memory practice and rote
6	External rewards and punishments not necessary, i.e. intrinsic motivation	6	External rewards used, e.g. grades i.e. extrinsic motivation
7	Not too concerned with conventional academic standards	7	Concerned with academic standards
8	Little testing	8	Regular testing
9	Accent on cooperative group work	9	Accent on competition
10	Teaching not confined to classroom base	10	Teaching confined to classroom base
11	Accent on creative expressive	11	Little emphasis on creative expression

**Table 6.1 - Bennett's (1976) Characteristics of Teaching Styles**

### **6.3.5 Contextual Parameters of the Research**

As a result of the literature investigations, I derived the following principle contextual settings in which children and young people experience much of their lives:

- Educational (Nursery, School, College and University)
- Legal (public, criminal and civil law)
- Medical Family
- Leisure/social Community
- Political

During the exploratory information gathering session, the feedback from the

group members indicated that, within this list of contextual settings, the following three settings were felt to offer the most comfortable areas in which children and young people would be able and willing to share their experiences and thoughts:

- School
- Community
- Leisure/Social

Consequently, these three settings were incorporated into my research as a core component of the research parameters.

### 6.3.6 Fieldwork Matrix

In the following sections, I will set out an analysis of the data, outcomes and evaluation conclusions that have emerged from undertaking the various research IGWP sessions and activities. In order to provide an overview of these activities, I have tabulated them into the following matrix table:

Field Research Conducted						
Activity	Adult Questionnaire	Semi-Structured Interviews	Interactive Group Work Programme			Organisational Information
Pilot Study St T.	Questionnaire 1 Staff profile & 10 questions (Appendix 5) 20 returned questionnaires	3 semi-structured interviews conducted (Appendix 1, pp. 56 - 58)	Red Group 10 pupils Aged 10-11 year old	Green Group 10 pupils Aged 10-11 year old	Blue Group 10 pupils Aged 10-11 year old	School Council terms of reference Observation of School Council in operation
			(Appendix 4)			

Table 6.2 Information about the extent of the research undertaken throughout the PhD process

## 6.4 Session One

### 6.4.1 Activity 1 – Agreeing the Ground Rules

In undertaking this first activity, I sought to immediately place responsibility and participation action in the hands of the children and young people in such a way that it would, I felt, provoke a keen and enthusiastic response. Whilst, central to this exercise was the need to create a definitive set of rules, which could form a good working platform for the subsequent participation activities, it was also geared towards assessing the pupils' own level of understanding and insight into the basic principles that underpin activities centred on dialogue and engagement processes.

The following list of 16 rules was compiled by the children and young people:

1. To have fun!
2. Don't laugh at other peoples' ideas
3. Have respect for other ideas/opinions
4. To listen – don't speak if someone else is talking
5. Explain and answer fully
6. Don't argue or laugh at or verbally bully other children/YP
7. Tell the truth
8. Everyone to join in and feel included
9. Support each other
10. Be prepared to share
11. Confidentiality – personal to this group
12. Keep to time limits

13. Not too noisy in group activities
14. Check out
15. Azora to use child friendly language
16. Children and young people to ask if they are not sure

In analysing these statements it is possible to subdivide them into three categories each with a particular focus - 'respect', 'inclusion' and 'order', which are set out in the table below.

**Figure 6.2 - Analysis of Ground Rules Data**

RESPECT	INCLUSION	ORDER
(2) Don't laugh at other peoples' ideas	(6) Don't argue or laugh at or verbally bully other children/YP	(1) To have fun!
(3) Have respect for other ideas/opinions	(8) Everyone to join in and feel included	(5) Explain and answer fully
(4) To listen – don't speak if someone else is talking	(9) Support each other	(7) Tell the truth
(11) Confidentiality – personal to <u>this</u> group	(10) Be prepared to share	(12) Keep to time limits
(14) Check out	(15) Azora to use child friendly language	(13) Not too noisy in group activities
	(16) Children/YP to ask if they are not sure	



### **6.4.2 Concluding Comments**

In my observation of this exercise, I was impressed with the dialogue that ensued in the group to arrive at these particular set of rules, which in my experience is not far removed from a list that would emerge from an experienced adult group working in a similar fashion. The emphasis was clearly on the need for fairness, tolerance, the avoidance of ridicule and support for one another. There was a good balance between the needs of inclusion and those of respect, whilst ensuring that an element of ordered discipline was also set in place. The pupils demonstrated a clear perception for what was required in the given context and what would work well to achieve success.

Although, I believe this exercise was conducted well, I concluded that it could have had a further dimension added to it to bring greater awareness to the importance of shared responsibilities and rights. That said, a number of the rules did infer a recognition in part that they had a responsibility to also work as a group and not just as individuals, for example, rule 9 – ‘Support each other’ and rule 10 – ‘Be prepared to share’, recognised collective responsibility. Similarly, rule 11 – ‘confidentiality – personal to this group’, also recognised an issue of right. As a consequence, I reformulated this exercise within the main case study programme in order to draw greater attention to this added consideration.

### **6.4.3 Activity 2 - Examples of experiences of being listened to**

In activity 2, I set out what I thought would be a relatively simple task to help introduce the children and young people to the process of dividing into small

groups, in order to work together and provide a few short reflections on their experiences of being listened to within each of the three selected contextual settings. I had purposefully, decided that the question should be as open ended as possible so as to allow the children and young people the opportunity to be free to be more conceptual in their responses, should they wish to be.

Table 6.5 (over leaf) sets out the pupil's actual responses to the question posed, which was to provide examples of where they have had experiences of being listened to or in being able to participate in a decision which affected them. In undertaking the data analysis arising from this activity and after much deliberation involving sifting and sorting, which initially focused on a themed categorisation that looked at commonalities in source, for example, communication between various similar parties, I ended up focusing on the commonalities that underpinned the context and form of the experiences identified. This led me to separate the responses and ultimately to identify that there were two distinct contexts in which the communications were being articulated. These were between a child and a child and those between a child and an adult, or visa versa. As a result of this analysis, I was able to generate the following colour coding that defined these differences, which are set out in Table 6.4 – Analysis Key.

**Table 6.4 - Analysis Key**

Key in Colours						
Instructive Child-to- Child	Instructive Child- Adult- Child	Expressive Child-to- Child	Expressive Child- Adult- Child	Negative Child-to- Child	Negative Child- Adult- Child	No Re- sponse

In terms of the form of the communications that were being related, it appeared that there were a number of distinct differences. Alongside the few negative statements, there were statements that spoke of the communication in terms of imparting information in an 'instructive' manner, whilst on other occasions the form of communication centred on a definite dialogue or sharing of ideas and opinions in a more 'expressive' manner.

As a result of these defined analytical forms, I undertook an interpretative assessment of each of the pupil's responses. The colour codes were accordingly applied to the pupils' tabulated responses, which are set out in Table 6.5 – Actual Pupil Statements and Researchers Assumptions and Interpretations.

Having undertaken this exercise, it was possible to arrive at a separate set of quantitative data results for each of the three contextual settings, which are illustrated in Tables 6.6 – Data from the School setting, Table 6.7 – Data from the Community setting, and Table 6.8 – Data from the Leisure/Social setting. These tables have been collated and summaries in Table 6.9 – Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis (below). From these tables, I was able to assess the following statistical values:

1. Of the negative statements, which numbered 6 in total (5%) of the overall statements, the highest proportion (4%) relate to 'child-to-adult-to-child' communication as opposed to 'child-to-child' (1%).
2. The proportion of 'instructive' forms of communication 'child-to-adult-to-child' is consistently on average three times higher (28%) than for

<b>The Results: Table 6.5 Actual Pupil Statements and Researchers Assumptions and Interpretation</b>					
<b>Settings &amp; Responses</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>A &amp; B</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Leisure/Social</b>
<b>Pair 1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>A</b>	I was listened to by a teacher when some one fell over and got hurt.	I was listened to by the ambulance man when my dad broke his leg/ankle.	The youth group decided what to do when we made a choice to go out.
	<b>2</b>	<b>B</b>	I was listened to by my teacher when I was stuck with my school work. I got help.	I was listened to by the police man when some man came in my house without permission.	I was listened to by my friend when we did literacy work.
<b>Pair 2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>A</b>	In groups when we do things together my friends listen to me.	When I answered a question in Brownies I was listened to	At home when we go out together as a family.
	<b>4</b>	<b>B</b>	I was listened to when working with Issy and we shared idea.	At home my parents listen to me.	Not being able to speak on MSN and at the youth group.
<b>Single Pupil 3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>A</b>	I don't think I have been listened to in class.	I don't think I have been listened to at home.	I don't think I've been listened to in social events.
	<b>6</b>	<b>B</b>	Not listened to in the play ground		
<b>Single Pupil 4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>A</b>	I am listened to outside in the play ground	I am listened to at home	I am listened to at the local youth group.
	<b>8</b>	<b>B</b>	I am listened to in the class	When I was talking to Heart researcher in town.	In the park playing with friends.
<b>Pair 5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>A</b>	When I go to school and see my friends and learning.	When my auntie was having a baby I called the ambulance and they listened and came.	I am listened to when I was young going to swimming lessons helped me to swim.
	<b>10</b>	<b>B</b>	When my teacher listens to me to help me.	I was listened to by the policeman when somebody broke down the front door.	
<b>Pair 6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>A</b>	I listen to people's ideas during work.	When I'm in the play ground, I chat to my friends.	I am listened to in the park playing with friends.
	<b>12</b>	<b>B</b>	I would help people when they're lost.	I am listened to at home.	
<b>Single Pupil 7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>A</b>	I was listened to when I had an idea during group work.	I am listened to when I chat with my friends.	I am listened to in my swimming lessons when I was younger.
	<b>14</b>	<b>B</b>	I was listened to by visitors if they got lost.	At home my parents listen to me.	I was listened to when I went to the fields with my school.
<b>Single Pupil 8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>A</b>	I was listened to by a teacher when a little child fell over, although I was the play leader.	I've never been listened to in the community Scouts group.	At my football club when I said pass the ball my friends listen to me.
	<b>16</b>	<b>B</b>		I was listened to by my parents at home.	I am listened to by my K partner.
<b>Settings</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>A</b>			



& Responses	& B	School	Community	Leisure/Social
Pair 9	17 A	When I am in class I am listened to so I can give my opinion.	I was listened to in a new routine in dance class and we timed it.	
	18 B	I was listened to in class about PSHE.	When in school we had to go in a group and we worked well together.	
Pair 10	19 A	When I played drums with other children who listened.		I am listened to when I played for Hamsted Diamonds
	20 B	When I sang for other people with my friends. I was told off by an adult when another child had said something very bad.		
Pair 11	21 A	In class 7 when they voted for Dee to be on school council in elections.	Me and my dad have a chat about anything in the morning on the way to school.	When I read and make reports about church activities or when I meet up with my friends at play scheme.
	22 B	The head teacher when we protested against other classes joining the school play and when I played in my orchestra for the last 3 years.	When my friends listen to me about my problems.	When my orchestra practises the group listen to my improvisation.
Pair 12	23 A	I was listened to in the playground when I played with my friend.	I was listened to in my church.	I was listened to in Guides when we were doing sports.
	24 B	I was listened to in the class when I put my hand up.	I was listened to on camp when I was camping with my friend.	I was listened to in my Cello lesson when I didn't understand.
Single Pupil 13	25 A	The head teacher listened to us when we protested against other classes joining the play.		
	26 B			
Pair 14	27 A	Big production – protesting and appealing to the head teacher who listened to us.	When I asked for certain foods my parents listen to me.	I am listened to when being able to play and participate in a play and play music.
	28 B	Being listened to by the congregation as I was a church reader.	When I asked to go to the ice ring my parents let me go.	The coach listened to me when I won the tennis tournament.
Settings & Responses	No &	School	Community	Leisure/Social

		B			
Single Pupil 15	29	A	I was listened to when we started our play scripts and fairy tale journals	I am listened to in my youth group.	I am listened to in the gym with the instructors.
	30	B	I was listened to by Tee when we did our mathematics maths game.	I am listened to in my church.	I am listened to in the swimming group with the instructors.
Single Pupil 16	31	A	I was listened to when I got into trouble with the head teacher because I wanted to tell my side of the story.	Reading in church.	I am listened to almost always at home.
	32	B	In class when I told my story.	In the Police station when I got lost in London.	When I get upset I am listened to.
Pair 17	33	A	I was listened to when I put my hand up in class.	I am listened to in the church.	At basket ball the coach listens to me when I was telling him about the formations.
	34	B	I had cut my knee and teacher listened to me about what had happened.		The swimming teacher listened to me.
Pair 18	35	A	In the play ground when we were playing a game.	At home when my parents hear what I say.	At the park when I'm playing football with my friends – they pass the ball to me.
	36	B	I am listened to in the medical room when I'm hurt.	On the street when I go to the shop the shop keeper listens to me.	In swimming when I used to talk to the lifeguard.
Single Pupil 19	37	A	In the class when I put my hand up.	I am listened to in the youth group.	Making swimming arrangements with my friends.
	38	B	At the congratulations assembly, the whole school listens.	At home when I talk to my parents and my brothers and sisters.	My coach listens to me when I play football.
Pair 20	39	A	I am listened to when someone is injured and someone needs help.	I am listened to at my local youth group.	I am listened to in the allotment when I want to grow some seeds.
	40	B	In the school council I give in my suggestions.	In church when I pray God hears me.	I am listened to when I am going swimming with my friends and we are deciding what time to meet up.

3. The experience of having an 'expressive' form of communication 'child-to-adult-to-child' is significantly lower in the school setting (17.5%) compared with 'child-to-child' (30%). To an extent, this is also reflected in the Leisure setting, although in the Community setting the opposite experience is recorded.
4. In total there is very little 'instructive forms of communication in the 'child-to-child' experiences (9%).
5. The 'expressive forms of communication for 'child-to-child' experiences are much higher (22%).
6. From a 'child-to-adult-to-child' experience, 'instructive' forms of communication are the highest of all the values (28.5%), although the total 'expressive' forms of communication are also quite high (22%).

*Analysis of Data from Activity 2* – (The numbers correlate with one of the pupils' statement in each of the settings)

Table 6.6: Data from School Setting – Researcher Assumptions & Interpretation

SCHOOL SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
12, 32, 35, 38.	1, 2, 10, 14, 15, 20, 28, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39.	3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 19, 21, 23, 30, 40.	17, 18, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29.	6.	5.	16, 26.
SUB-TOTALS 1/40 STATEMENTS						
4 or 10%	13 or 32%	12 or 30%	7 or 17%	1 or 2.5%	1 or 2.5%	2 or 5%
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/40 STATEMENTS						
17 or 42%		19 or 47%		2 or 5%		2 or 5%

Table 6.7: Data from Community Setting – Researcher Assumptions & Interpretation

COMMUNITY SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
18.	1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 17, 23, 31, 32, 33, 36.	11, 13, 22, 24, 40.	4, 7, 12, 14, 16, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 37, 38, 39.		5, 15.	6, 19, 20, 25, 26, 34.
SUB-TOTALS 1/40 STATEMENTS						
1 or 2.5%	12 or 30%	5 or 12%	14 or 35%	0	2 or 5%	6 or 15%
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/40 STATEMENTS						
13 or 32.5%		19 or 47%		2 or 5%		6 or 15%



Table 6.8: Data from Leisure/Social Setting – Researcher Assumptions &amp; Interpretation

LEISURE/SOCIAL SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
15, 16, 19, 23, 27, 35.	9, 13, 14, 24, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34.	1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 21, 22, 37, 40.	3, 31, 32, 36, 38, 39.		4, 5.	6, 10, 12, 17, 18, 20, 25, 26.
SUB-TOTALS 1/40 STATEMENTS						
6 or 15%	9 or 22%	9 or 22%	6 or 15%	0	2 or 5%	8 or 20%
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/40 STATEMENTS						
15 or 37%		15 or 37%		2 or 5%		8 or 20%

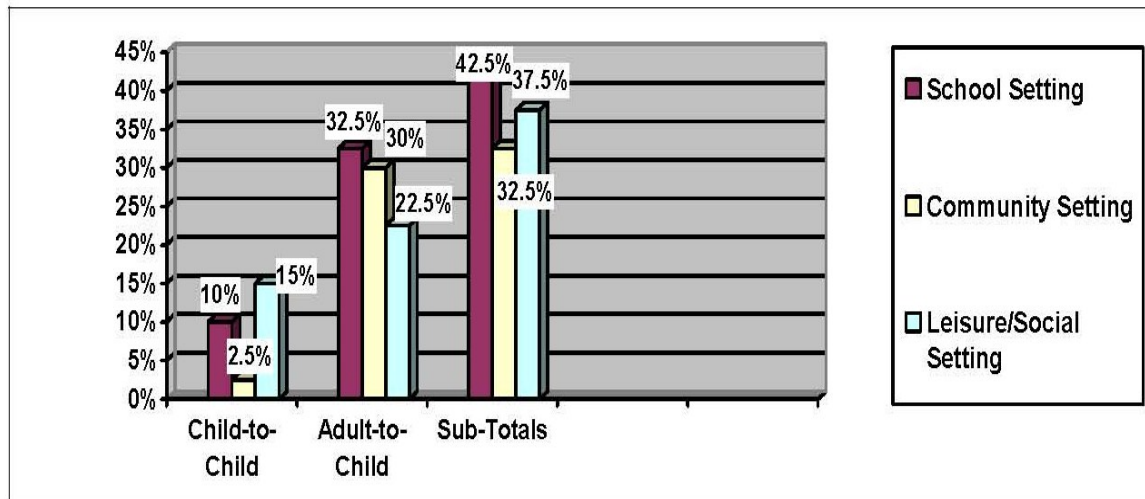
Within this analysis, the latter value is, however, slightly skewed by an unusually high community setting value, which has effectively doubled this total. It would otherwise have reflected an almost consistent opposite set of values with the 'instructive' form. Having looked again at the individual statements in the community setting in order to assess why this disparity may have occurred, it is clear that the children and young people's experiences relate predominantly to the dialogue they have with their parents and or family members. In many respects it was good to see this higher value being identified in this way. I believe, it is justified to separate this value from the overall totals because of this fact to arrive at a more accurate picture outside of the domestic environment.

Finally, as part of the data analysis, I have also provided a percentage breakdown in graph form, setting out the statistical details in a series of bar charts - Graphs 6.1 to 6.7 in order to be able to identify the various trends with greater visual clarity.

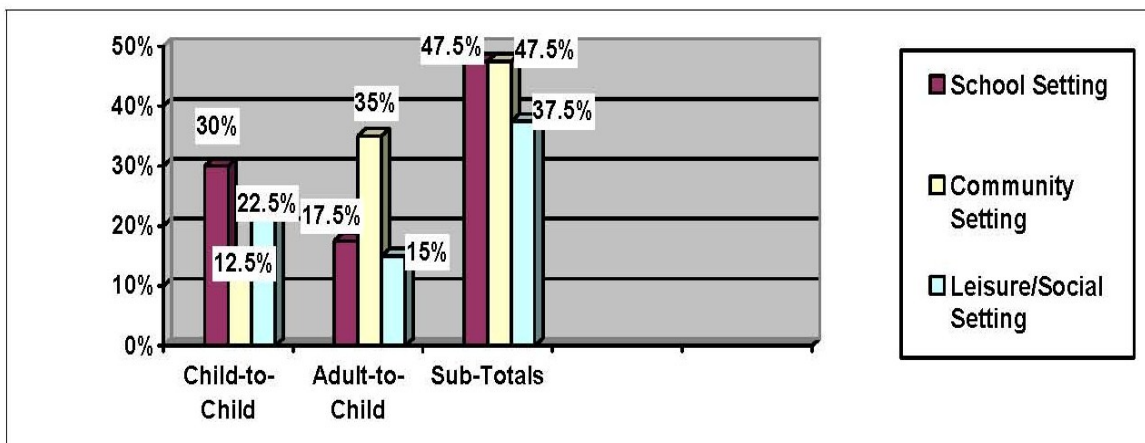


Setting	Statement No's & Percentages	Instructive		Sub Totals	Expressive		Sub Totals	Negative		Sub- Totals	No Response
		Child to Child	Child- to Adult-to -Child		Child to Child	Child- to Adult-to -Child		Child to Child	Child- to Adult-to -Child		
School	No's	4	13	17	12	7	19	1	1	2	2
	%	10%	32.5%	42.5%	30%	17.5%	47.5%	2.5%	2.5%	5%	5%
Community	No's	1	12	13	5	14	19	0	2	2	6
	%	2.5%	30%	32.5%	12.5%	35%	47.5%	0	5%	5%	15%
Leisure/ Social	No's	6	9	15	9	6	15	0	2	2	8
	%	15%	22.5%	37.5%	22.5%	15%	37.5%	0	5%	5%	20%
Totals as a percentage of the 120 statements		11 = 9%	34 = 28.5%	45 = 37.5%	26 = 22%	27 = 22%	53 = 44%	1 = 1%	5 = 4%	6 = 5%	16 = 13.5%

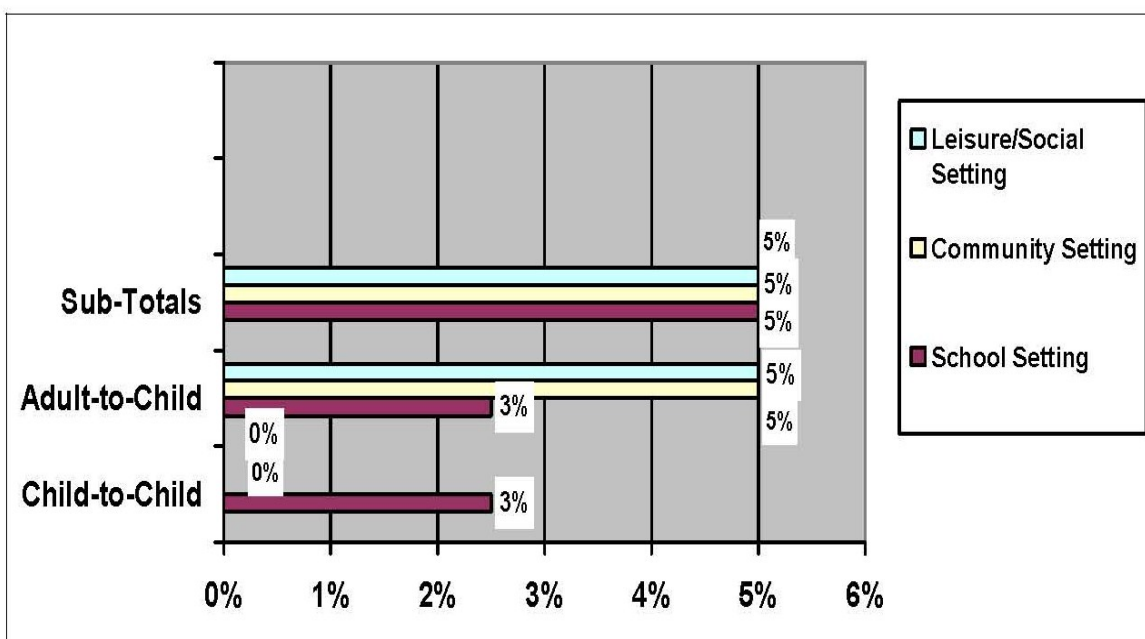
Table 6.9: Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis



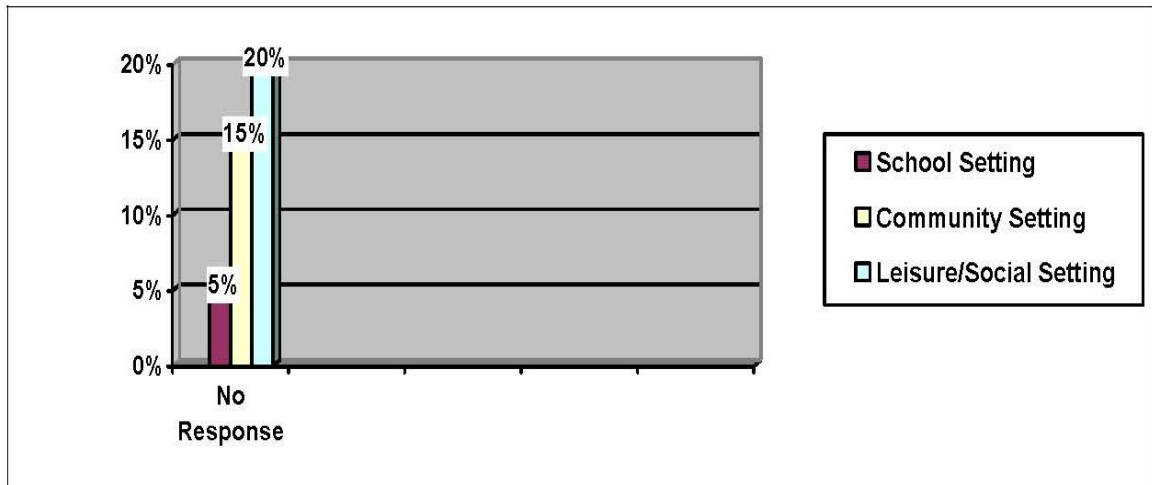
Graph 6.1 Researcher's 'Instructive' responses data across all settings



Graph 6.2 Researcher's 'Expressive' responses data across all settings

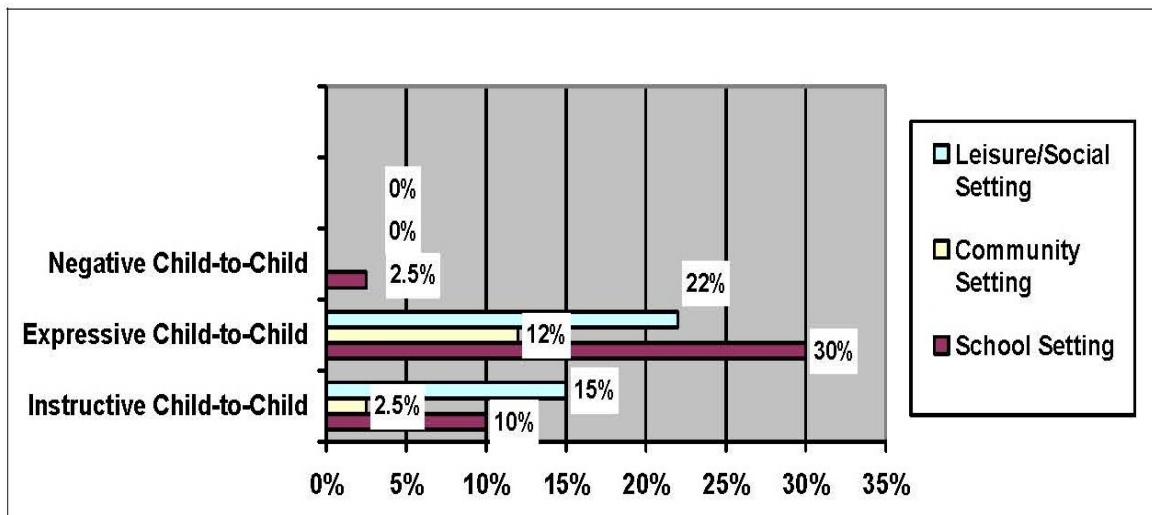


Graph 6.3 Researcher's 'Negative' response data across all settings

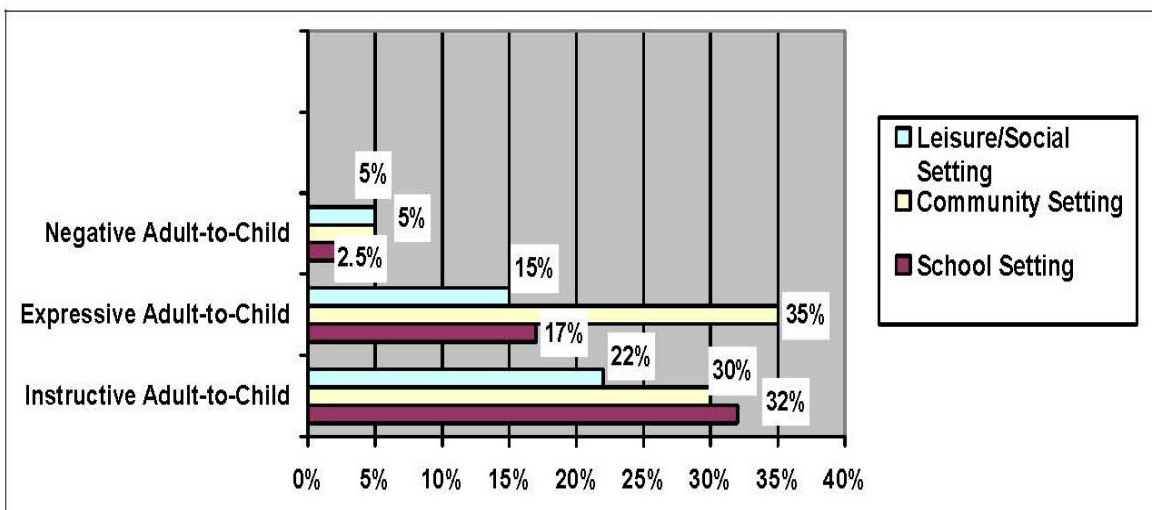


**Graph 6.4 Researcher's 'No' responses data across all settings**

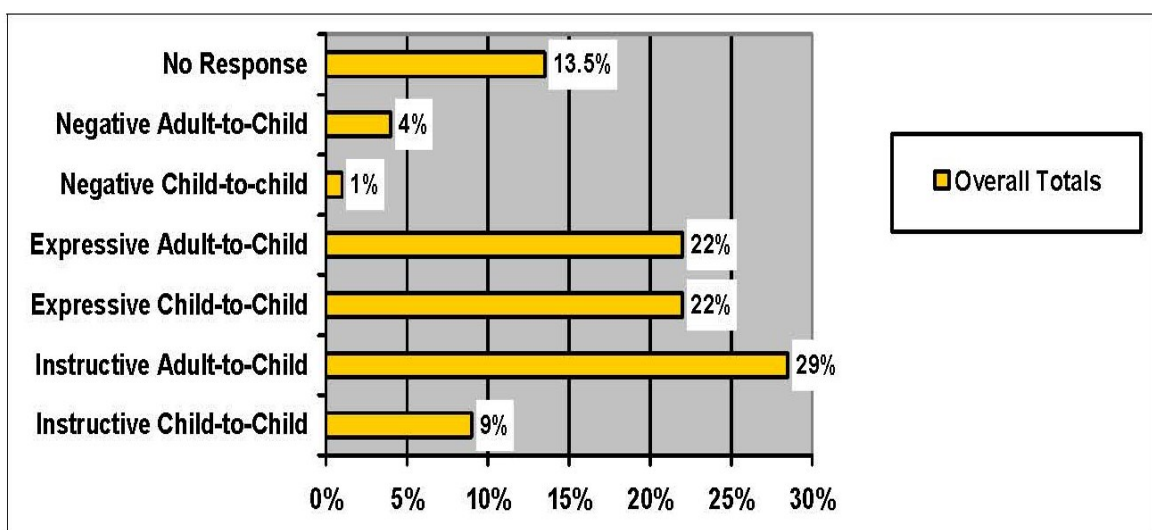
Whilst I had initially considered this exercise to be a rather simple short introductory activity, the evidence presented was unexpected and has proved of great value and beneficial to the research as a whole. The data analysis process has, in fact, revealed quite a significant factor in helping to understanding that there is a real differentiation in the form of communication that exists in the process of participation. As a consequence, I have been able to establish a meaningful quantitative outcome to the qualitative evaluation that I have developed, which was not envisaged at the outset. This has also led me to discern a further potential subtlety in relation to the theoretical concept of 'adultism' (Bell, 2005 & 2009, Lee, 2003, Sazama, 2009), in that adults may often perceive themselves to be fully engaging in active participation when, in fact, they are simply imparting information in an 'instructive' form. These subtleties are, I believe, evident in Hart's (2002) participation ladder, which identifies an 'expressive' form of communication existing within his designated levels 5 and above and implies an 'instructive' form of communication within level 4 in relation to the aspect of being 'informed'.



Graph 6.5 Researcher's 'child-to-child' responses data across all settings



Graph 6.6 Researcher's 'child-to-adult-to-child' responses data across all settings



Graph 6.7 Researcher's overall percentages across all settings

Since the identification of this distinction between the forms of communication, which appeared to be an important conclusion and a potential tool for being able to qualify the degree of active engagement with children and young people, I felt that it was both necessary and important to verify whether my own assumptions and interpretations would be reflected in a comparison control group (Bryman, 2008, Robson, 2005) of fellow peer professionals who also work directly with children and young people. Undertaking this evaluation exercise would help to validate my hypothesis and evaluation explanation for the data analysis undertaken. It would also, I believe, enable me to better understand the 'phenomenon' (Bryman, 2008, p.43) of my typologies in relation to a broader application and relevance. As part of this exercise, it was first necessary that I define the various forms of communication and the two contexts that I had identified, which are set out as follows:

**1. An 'Instructive' form of communication** - relates to the perception of listening experiences that involve communication, which is a direct giving or receiving of information with a particular listener(s), for example, 'child-to-child' or 'child-to-adult-to-child'. These experiences of being listened to essentially concern a form of communication primarily directed at imparting information in a manner which the communicator and recipient understand. Examples of 'instructive' statements are as follows:

- **'child-to-child':** In the school setting (statement 35), *"In the playground when we were playing a game"*. In the community setting (statement 18), *"When in School we had to go in a group and we worked well together"*. In

the leisure/social setting (statement 15), *“At my football club when I said pass the ball my friends listen to me”*.

- **‘child-to-adult-to-child’:** In the school setting, (statement 33), *“I was listened to when I put my hand up in class”*. In the community setting (statement 1), *“I was listened to by the ambulance man when my dad broke his leg/ankle”*. In the leisure/social setting (statement 29) *“In the gym with the instructors”*.

2. **An ‘Expressive’ form of communication** - relates to the perception of listening experiences that involve an interactive dialogue in which ideas, suggestions and opinions are exchanged. These experiences of being listened to are essentially directed at the mutual forming of opinions or views between the participants who might be either a ‘child-to-child’ or ‘child-to-adult-to-child’ to create a shared understanding. Examples of ‘expressive’ statements are as follows:

- **‘child-to-child’:** In the school setting (statement 13), *“I was listened to when I had an idea during group work”*. In the community setting (statement 22), *“When my friends listen to me about my problems”*. In the leisure/social setting (statement 1), *“The youth group decided what to do when we made a choice to go out”*.
- **‘child-to-adult-to-child’:** In the school setting, (statement 17), *“When I am in class I am listened to so I can give my opinion”*. In the community setting (statement 21), *“Me and my dad have a chat about anything in the morning on the way to school”*. In the leisure/social setting (statement 32) *“When I*

*get upset I am listened to”.*

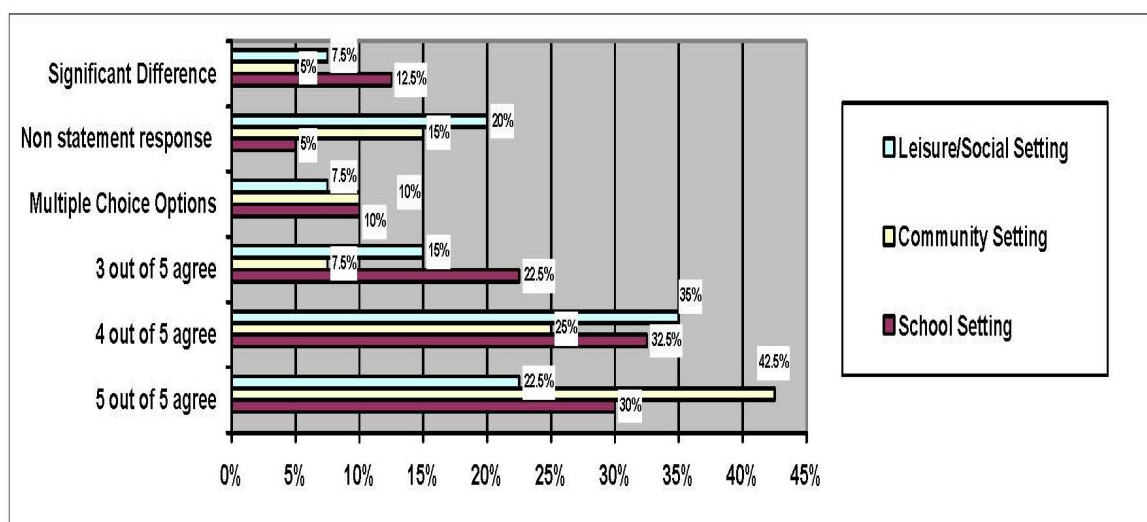
In order to verify these findings and their ‘face validity’ (Byrman, 2008, p152) I undertook a comparison control group process with four peer professionals (experts in their own field) from the following backgrounds to act as judges to determine whether the concepts were valid:

- A Children’s Centre (CC) Manager (Black female, aged 51-60)
- A Teaching Assistant (White female, aged 41-50)
- A Deputy Head Teacher (White female, aged 41-50)
- A Teacher (White female, aged 41-50)

Having met with each person individually and provided an explanation of how I had arrived at my conclusions and the definitions set out above, I then allowed each one time to collate their own interpretation assessments. The analysis of the responses from the peer comparative control group, including my own detailed reflective narrative and observations are set out in Table 1.7 - Peer Review Data from School Setting – A Comparative Control Group, and Tables 1.8 and 1.9 which relate to the community and leisure/social settings. This analysis is included in the detailed pilot study narrative in Appendix 4. The data indicates that there was significant agreement when taking the majority view into account. Where the option choices fell into either 5/5 or 4/5 or 3/5 a total of 77.5% (93/120) was recorded. When the non statement responses were factored in, the actual number of statements across all three settings totalled 104 or 89.5% agreement.

Within the evaluation process and commentary, I have identified a total of 10 significant differences – 5 in the Community setting, 2 in the Leisure/Social

setting and 3 in the school setting, which gives a percentage of 8.5%. It is noted that the majority of these variances (8/10) related to the teachers selected choices. Graphs 6.8 and Table 6.10 summarises the source data.



Graph 6.8 Overall approximate percentages across all respondents for each of the settings as a comparative control group

Agreement and Settings	School Setting	Community Setting	Leisure/social Setting	Overall Approximate Percentages	Majority
5 out 5	12 or 30%	17 or 42.5%	9 or 22.5%	38/120 or 31.5%	3 or more respondent agreement 93/120 or 77% of the time
4 out 5	13 or 32.5%	10 or 25%	14 or 35%	37/120 or 31%	
3 out 5	9 or 22.5%	3 or 7.5%	6 or 15%	18/120 or 15%	
Multiple Choice Options from Respondents	4 or 10%	3 or 7.5%	3 or 7.5%	10/120 or 8.5%	-
Non Statement Response from Pupils	2 or 5%	6 or 15%	8 or 20%	16/120 or 14%	16/120 or 14%
Significant Differences Between Respondents	5 or 12.5%	2 or 5%	3 or 7.5%	10/120 or 8.5%	10/120 or 8.5%

Table 6.10 Data in approximate percentages for all respondents in the comparative control group



#### 6.4.4 Concluding Comments

An unintended consequence of this form of comparative design (Bryman, 2008, pp. 58 – 60) was the way each individual peer professional approached the process and entered into a dialogue with me afterwards. For example, the CC Manager took the approach of placing herself into the imaginary shoes of the pupils when deciding where to place each of the statement responses, whereas the teacher took a very different approach expressed a more authoritarian orientated viewpoint in her decision making. Both the teaching assistant and deputy head teacher had on the other hand, a more child and young person centred viewpoint and had a greater understanding about how pupils would think, particularly within the school setting. Tables 1.7 - 1.9 (Appendix 4) sets out in detail an evaluation explanation for the various differences between the interpretations made by the peer group. It is recognised that some of the statements can be interpreted in more than one direction, which does account for part of the variations. On the whole, however, there is a good proportion of similarity in the decisions made with approximately 90% majority agreement (3 out of 5 or above). It has, in my view as a consequence, affirmed the 'reliability, validity, replicability and generalizability' (Bryman, 2008, p.60) of my research approach, assumptions and interpretations in my analysis, which has led me to conclude that there is a distinct difference between participation that is based on an 'instructive' form of communication and that which is based on an 'expressive' form.

### 6.4.5 Activity 3 - 10 Words to express feelings about being listened to and included

In this session, each group was asked to work for a period of 15 minutes in order to set out a list of words (a maximum of 10) in response to the following two questions, which were aimed at evaluating the emotional impact that can be experienced, derived from either a positive or non-positive form of engagement.

1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?
2. When we are not listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?

Table 6.11 – All Group Feedback and Word Choices (below) records the various responses given by the three groups. After each group completed the task, they were asked to present their list to the whole class in order that they could share their thoughts with each other and to look at the similarities and differences that had emerged.

#### *Group Work Responses*

1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?			2. When we are <u>not</u> listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?		
Blue Group	Red Group	Green Group	Blue Group	Red Group	Green Group
1. Grateful	1. Great	1. Listened to	1. Unhappy	1. Sad	1. Isolated
2. We feel good	2. Good	2. Respected	2. Sad	2. Unhappy	2. Disappointed
3. Happy	3. Thrilling	3. Happy	3. Useless	3. Up-set	3. Left-out
4. Good	4. Excited	4. Nervous	4. Without a purpose	4. Annoying	4. Small
5. Thankful	5. Exhilarating	5. Thought about	5. Alone, alone	5. Miserable	5. Annoyed
6. Glad	6. Included	6. Accepted	6. Miserable	6. Melancholy	6. Rejected
7.	7. Scintillating	7. Ecstatic	7. Unappreciated	7. Left out	7. Unhappy
8.	8. Stupendous	8. Enjoyment	8. Not important	8. Not included	8. Melancholy
9.	9. Elated	9. Valued	9. Unnecessary	9. Depressed	9. Angry
10.	10. Extravaganza	10. One top of the world	10. Angry	10. Unfaithful, ignored and a waste	10. Excluded, Irritated and Ignored

**Table 6.11 - All Groups' feedback and word choices**

In looking at these responses and having observed the groups undertaking the exercise and listened to their feedback, I sought to determine whether and to what extent there were commonalities in thought, attitude and experience being expressed. From this analysis, I was able to identify the following three distinctive traits or characteristics:

1. **To relate gratification at being included** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel happy and thankful when adults actively relate, listen and include them.
2. **To raise the spirit in a responsive way** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel that their spirit is up-lifted as a direct response when adults listen to and include them.
3. **To value and respect participation** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel a sense of value when they are respected, listened to and included by adults.

There is also a fourth area, which relates to an uncertainty about the meaning of the word in the context of the question. Tables 6.12 to 6.14 (below) illustrate the designation of these categories as set against the responses.

<b>1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>	<b>2. When we are <u>not</u> listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>
Grateful	1	Unhappy	1
We feel good	1	Sad	1
Happy	1	Useless	5
Good	1	Without a purpose	5
Thankful	1	Alone, alone	2
Glad	1	Miserable	1
		Unappreciated	3
		Not important	3
		Unnecessary	6
		Angry	4

**Table 6.12 - Blue Groups' feedback and categorisation**

<b>1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>	<b>2. When we are <u>not</u> listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>
Great	1	Sad	1
Good	1	Unhappy	1
Thrilling	2	Up-set	1
Excited	2	Annoying	4
Exhilarating	2	Miserable	1
Included	3	Melancholy	1
Scintillating	2	Left out	2
Stupendous	2	Not included	2
Elated	2	Depressed	1
Extravaganza	2	Unfaithful, Ignored and A waste	6 3 5

Table 6.13 - Red Groups' feedback and categorisation

<b>1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>	<b>2. When we are <u>not</u> listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?</b>	<b>Category Number for Characteristic Traits</b>
Listened to	3	Isolated	2
Respected	3	Disappointed	1
Happy	1	Left-out	2
Nervous	4	Small	6
Thought about	3	Annoyed	4
Accepted	3	Rejected	5
Ecstatic	2	Unhappy	1
Enjoyment	1	Melancholy	1
Valued	3	Angry	4
One top of the world	2	Excluded, Irritated and Ignored	2 4 3

Table 6.14 - Green Groups' feedback and categorisation

Table 6.15 – Provides an overall summary of these categories, from which it can be seen that the overwhelming majority of responses provide a clear and certain view that the children and young people fully understand and can readily articulate their feelings about their experience of being included and listened to. As well as expressing a positive disposition towards inclusion with adults, they also identified an inspirational characteristic to inclusion, which is systematic of a natural desire, I believe, to be actively included.

In responding to question 2, Table 6.16 (below) again records the actual responses of the pupils set within an analysis summary profile. My analysis in this instance has identified the following 6 characteristics, which express a variety of feelings and emotions:

1. **To express discontentment** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel melancholy when adults do not listen and exclude them.
2. **To be absent from participation** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel cut off and isolated when adults do not listen and exclude them.
3. **To wilfully disregard** – this Category confirms that the children and young people can also feel discounted and ignored when adults do not listen and exclude them.
4. **To provoke discord** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel annoyed and irritated when adults do not listen and exclude them.
5. **To reject and be devalued** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel useless and discounted when adults do not listen and exclude them.
6. **To demean status** – this Category confirms that the children and young people feel humiliated in status when adults do not listen and exclude them.

**Categorisation of Data for Question 1**

<b>1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?</b>			
<b>Category Number and Characteristic Traits</b>	<b>Blue Group Words</b>	<b>Red Group Words</b>	<b>Green Group Words</b>
<b>1</b> <b>To relate gratification at being included</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We feel good</li> <li>▪ Good</li> <li>▪ Happy</li> <li>▪ Glad</li> <li>▪ Thankful</li> <li>▪ Grateful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good</li> <li>▪ Great</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Happy</li> <li>▪ Enjoyment</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>To raise the spirit in a responsive way</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Excited</li> <li>▪ Exhilarating</li> <li>▪ Elated</li> <li>▪ Thrilling</li> <li>▪ Scintillating</li> <li>▪ Stupendous</li> <li>▪ Extravaganza</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ On top of the world</li> <li>▪ Ecstatic</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> <b>To value and respect participation</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respected</li> <li>▪ Thought about</li> <li>▪ Accepted</li> <li>▪ Valued</li> <li>▪ Listened to</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> <b>(Unsure of meaning)</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nervous</li> </ul>

Table 6.15: Data from all the groups to question 1

**Categorisation of Data for Question 2**

<b>2. When we are <u>not</u> listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?</b>			
<b>Category Number and Characteristic Traits</b>	<b>Blue Group Words</b>	<b>Red Group Words</b>	<b>Green Group Words</b>
<b>1</b> <b>To express discontentment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unhappy</li> <li>▪ Sad</li> <li>▪ Miserable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Up-set</li> <li>▪ Unhappy</li> <li>▪ Depressed</li> <li>▪ Sad</li> <li>▪ Miserable</li> <li>▪ Melancholy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unhappy</li> <li>▪ Disappointed</li> <li>▪ Melancholy</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>To be absent from participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Alone, alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Left out</li> <li>▪ Not included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Isolated</li> <li>▪ Left out</li> <li>▪ Excluded</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> <b>To wilfully disregard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unappreciated</li> <li>▪ Not important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ignored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ignored</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> <b>To provoke discord</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Angry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Annoying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Irritated</li> <li>▪ Annoyed</li> <li>▪ Angry</li> </ul>
<b>5</b> <b>To reject and devalue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Useless</li> <li>▪ Without a purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A waste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rejected</li> </ul>
<b>6</b> <b>To demean status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unnecessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unfaithful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Small</li> </ul>

Table 6.16: Data from all the groups to question 2

#### **6.4.6 Final Concluding Comments**

In this Activity, I have focused on capturing the pupils' feelings about their experiences. Along with the actual data responses obtained from this exercise, it also facilitated a more interactive group work task to be entered into, which involved all the pupils working co-operatively together, so as to demonstrate problem solving and presentational skills. In my observations, I was able to evaluate the pupils' ability to articulate and communicate their feelings and experiences. I was able to discern and appraise the maturity of the pupils' level of speech and language, as well as being able to observe their use of body language, tone of voice, facial expression, gestures and actions (Tough, 1976) throughout the activity itself and during the presentations. I was able to develop three main characteristic traits to determine good experiences of being listened to and six main characteristics for poor experiences of not being listened to.

This activity gave me a greater insight into what children and young people feel when they encounter both positive and negative experiences of being listened to by adults. The application of a rationalisation process has helped me begin the evaluative exercise of forming a possible paradigm shift that would explain the impact of these feelings and views, which has been very beneficial to my research development. The discourse analysis of the data has helped to operationalise the simple use of the pupils' language to create variables, which can be measured by one of the characteristic traits in both profiles. As a consequence, the abstract characteristics have been translated into an arrangement that has meaning and can describe the social reality of the pupils and the ontological view in which they see and experience the world.

It is evident from the data that the pupils' experience of not being listened to has had a significant impact on their emotions and attitudes. The categorisation of the six distinct negative traits arising from this analysis, as outlined in Table 1.16, indicates, in my view, a poor experience of adult interaction, which seems to be more dominant than the otherwise positive experiences that the pupils described, when they are listened to and included. What seems to be clear from my evaluation is that the children and young people have a positive desire and wish to be involved, that they believe they are often deliberately excluded and that their presence and opinions can be devalued, ridiculed and discounted such that it creates enmity and isolation. As I developed my analysis further, I began to conclude that these experiences were centred on issues that corresponded to a basic level of *respect* for children and young people as individuals with common rights to involvement and expression. Since, however, my literature investigation had led me to the view that for the most part adults do not deliberately seek to disregard children and young people, this issue, I felt, must therefore be connected in some way to the possible basic inability, on the part of adults, to be able to *relate* effectively to young citizens. As a result of this failure to relate, any possible outcomes created yet a further failure in the adults effectiveness and ability to be able to *respond* adequately.

Consequently, I decided to begin the process of seeking to focus my IGWP towards testing these factors (*respect, relate and respond*) as I continued with the programme in the subsequent sessions and in the main case study.

## 6.5 Session Two



### 6.5.1 Activity 4 - Circle Time Discussion and My Observations

The first part of Session Two involved 'Circle Time' - a discussion with all the pupils sitting in a circle. Circle Time offers the opportunity to explore a number of specific aims, which can foster and advance the participation agenda. These aims are, according to Mosley (2005):

1. To help implement a whole school positive behaviour approach
2. To introduce Quality Circle Time and show how it can contribute to the enhancement of self-esteem in children, young people and adults and create a positive school ethos
3. To provide clear, accessible lesson plans for teachers who want to develop the approach in their classroom

Accordingly, I was able to manage the group work discussion in the fourth activity, mindful that the setting up of 'circle time' is the start of a process for 'involving children in school citizenship to help create an environment conducive to real consultation, shared responsibility and decision-making' (<http://www.circletime.co.uk/circletimeguide2.htm>, February 2010). The rationale behind this approach was to provide an opportunity for me, as the researcher, and the class to communicate in a more open forum about a central research element concerning their involvement in the decisions that affect their lives. I felt I could do this more effectively by conducting an activity which enabled the pupils to enter into a broader discussion in a structured way, and in order to help them to share their ideas, to voice their opinion, to listen to their understanding of the world around them, and to consider any similarities and differences with each

other in their discussion. Prior to undertaking this exercise, I had discussed the approach with the class teacher who helped me to formulate the best way to deliver the activity. She also confirmed that the pupils were familiar with the concept of circle time discussion, which was very helpful.

In opening the discussion, I posed the following two open ended questions to help stimulate their thoughts on this subject area:

1. What would you tell adults, if you had the opportunity, to give them feedback about the decisions you would like to be involved with in each of the settings?
2. What do you think adults need to do to help you be more involved in decisions so that you are able to participate and feel included in each of the settings.

The pupils took it in turns to speak by passing a ball to one another. During the discussion some of the following comments were made as examples of what the pupils expressed:

1. 'To include the kids so that they can get children's point of view and to see if they like it' (female)
2. 'To take us out on more social activities' (male)
3. 'They should let the responsible children decide fair punishments and let us choose where we want to sit' (male)
4. 'Adults need to listen more and give us more freedom to decide' (female)

5. 'To set up groups and organisations for children so that they can trust us more' (male)
6. 'Adults could let us have a vote so then we can get to have our say in the discussion' (female).
7. 'I think that adults need to listen more often, also they should talk to us privately so that they are not distracted' (female)
8. 'I would talk to them to tell them were they could improve and what they should get rid of' (female)
9. 'We could have an independent day where teachers could trust us and see what we can do' (female)
10. 'It we were able to get involved, we'd be good' (male)
11. 'They could put us in groups and give us jobs to do for a week' (female)
12. They could choose to let children decide what to get and put in the parks and other places like that' (male)

The circle time was a calm exercise to do as the pupils sat quietly and listened to the various contributions being made. It was clear that the pupils were very familiar with this form of activity. I believe that the responses recorded above, indicate that the pupils were able and capable of expressing their thoughts and in making many valid and interesting suggestions. Although, the pupils did not specifically answer any one of the two questions directly, nevertheless the flow of the discussion led to an open dialogue about being involved and being able to get involved. On reflection, I believe the reference to the three settings was too obtuse and a little too long.

Alongside these outcomes, the exercise also allowed me to monitor the pupils' interactions with one another. In doing this, I was able to observe that some pupils, who put their hands up to take receipt of the ball to speak, were not given the opportunity because they were being excluded by other members of the group. At the same time, some other members of the group were seemingly more popular, and were given the opportunity to contribute more often. My observations indicated to me that there was a definite choice by some pupils to pass to their friends and to exclude others. The pupils' behaviour, in this matter, surprised me, as I had believed that the ground rules, which they had created, would have helped to provide a greater sense of collective responsibility and ownership.

The fact that some pupils did not abide by the ground rules led me to believe that listening to children and young people and promoting their participation in a range of decision making processes, whilst valued and credible, has to be actively developed and inter-woven into their psyche (conscious mind) in order to develop their actual experiences of being responsible as young citizens. According to James, Jenks and Prout (2007) they (the children) cannot routinely be given responsibility as they cannot 'be left to their own devices' (James, Jenks and Prout, 2007, p.14) without having the capability to demonstrate responsibility. In James and Prout edited book (1997) it is asserted that there is a 'laissez-faire capitalism' (p.40) that projects the idea of a natural and innocent childhood, which in my view can be ambivalent when it comes to young citizen's concept of responsibility in the everyday practices of expressing and asserting their rights in the decision making processes. A rights-based discourse of listening and

participation tends to raise questions about a child's responsibility and competence. This, I believe, suffers enormously from a misunderstanding and distortion for taking responsibility capable of contributing to all decisions affecting a young citizen's life.

### **6.5.2 Concluding Comments**

In this small scale observation exercise, the demonstration that there had been a definitive decision by some pupils to exercise a 'choice' to exclude others in the discussion, is evidence of the 'myth of a happy childhood, where children can skip along without care or responsibility ignores the daily grind on many children's lives' (Willow, 2002, p.40). Kellmer-Pringle (1975, in James and Prout, 1997) suggests that there are four basic needs in children – 'for love and security, for new experiences, for praise and recognition and for responsibility' (p.69). In so far as the need relates to the issue of responsibility, I believe, there is an important key to understanding the obstacles that can sometimes exist between an adult's interaction with young citizens and the lived experiences of children and young people in being able to demonstrate responsibility. The notion of responsibility is 'highly valued amongst western nations where individualism, independent thinking, flexibility and assertiveness are the roots to personal achievement' (James and Prout, 1997, p.73). The ability to demonstrate responsibility is generally located in adults as a concern rooted in the distinction between seeing children and young people as competent beings, rather than as potentially developing into adults, which Qvortrup (1994) expresses as 'becomings'. The competence of young citizens as a social construct (James and Prout, 1997, Willow, 2002, Leira and Saracena 2008, James, Jenks and Prout,

2007, Clark, Kjørholt and Moss, 2008) is criticised by Nijnatten (1993, in Clark, Kjørholt and Moss, 2008) on the grounds that it places too heavy a burden on children's shoulders by giving them too much responsibility and exposing them to inadequate care and protection. This perspective resonates with McLeod (2008) who talks about providing a platform from which the involvement of young citizens in decisions and taking responsibility should be at 'different levels of participation appropriate for different children faced with different decisions at different times in their lives' (p.174). The appropriate level of responsibility in children and young people is to observe their behaviour and for the adult to play a limited role unless the need arises. From my observation of the circle time discussion, it was clear that the exclusion of some pupils to be involved in the discussion was a 'responsible choice' and affirmative action by those pupils. There is obviously a fine balance in determining any form of intervention, which in my view, should always accord with the groups' sense of fairness within the given situation. As a result of this viewpoint, I felt obliged, therefore, to overrule those pupils' wishes and choices to exclude in favour of intervention, to include the pupils who were being deliberately excluded. I genuinely felt it was necessary to protect the excluded pupils by making reference to their ground rules. This had a positive effect for the rest of the activity as I had 'pricked' the conscience of the whole group by reminding them on the need to be inclusive.

### **6.5.3 Activity 5 – Things that affect you, which you have a view on**

In this fifth activity, I divided the large group into three smaller colour coded groups (Blue, Red and Green) in order that they could work together. The activity was based on looking at a set of 32 images that illustrated various different

contextual situations in the three settings - School, Community and Leisure/Social, in order to see what resonance they had with the children and young people's own lived experiences. Table 6.17 below is an extract of Table 1.17 in Appendix 4 (containing all 32 images) illustrating images taken from various social settings against which the pupils were asked to provide a short commentary about what they perceived the image to mean for them. The purpose of this exercise was to utilise a form of 'Mosaic approach' (Clark and Moss, 2008, p.11), which combines the visual with the verbal' (Roberts-Holmes, 2008, p.129), in order to help elicit further insights and awareness about the world around them and to see if they had any specific views on the issues portrayed in the images. In order to help them get started, I posed a generalised question: 'To




Images	Individual Group Responses		
1	Blue Group	Red Group	Green Group
	<p>Community vandalism – bad. This is a community setting. Graffiti/vandalism costs lots of money to repair. Why do people do it – bad kids want to be popular, like it as it is fun and boredom.</p>	<p>Vandalism and graffiti.</p>	<p>We will see vandalism not the natural world. Community</p>
	<p>School – very useful. School and leisure setting. Homework maybe stuck and too difficult to do and boredom. To improve your learning and make you focused.</p>	<p>Cheerful, but bored.</p>	<p>What's the point of homework when we do work at school, but it keeps us motivated.</p>
	<p>Leisure/Social – energetic. Community setting. Keeps us healthy having good exercise. It also helps us practise and show our abilities. Show you that you are part of a team, socialise with teammates. Keep people out of trouble. Keep happy but competitive.</p>	<p>Friendship.</p>	<p>To keep us healthy and make you part of a team. Part of the community helps keep people out of trouble. Community and leisure/social</p>

Table 6.17 - Images and Individual Group Responses (sample - Appendix 4)

provide feedback on the images and consider if the picture has any affect on you in your lives, which you may have a view or opinion on?’

In Table 6.17 (above), I have sought to capture the general discussion undertaken by the pupils in the plenary session. In this discussion, the pupils provided a collective description of the images and what they meant to them. It was a difficult part of the session to manage, as many of the pupils wanted to talk at the same time. The class teacher wrote down the pupils’ commentary remarks and notes to capture their expressions. The class teacher had to intervene on a few occasions to request the pupils to calm down and to take it in turns to share their views. This helped me to manage the enthusiasm of the pupils and to draw out some of the key points from them. This part of the exercise was hard due to the number of pupils in the class (30 in total). As a consequence, I felt under pressure since I was not used to or experienced in managing large groups of children and young people in a school structured environment. The class teacher’s input was a great help and calmed the class sufficiently to enable me to complete the task before the end of the session. In my post reflection, I was able to see that the pupils placed me into the ‘teachers’ role. Most probably, this was because in their experience this form of teaching method was a teacher led event.

On reflection, I realised that I slipped into the ‘teachers’ role in an attempt to achieve a commentary response to all the images for the research. I believe that I should not have focused too heavily on this need, as it was not directly the aim of the exercise. Rather, I should have focused more on listening to the pupils’



perspectives and their manner of sharing their views and interactions with each other, in order to fully appreciate what they were sharing about their understanding of the world around them. In this way, I would have been able to piece together the pupils' 'dialogue, reflection and interpretation' (Clark and Moss, 2008, p.11) more clearly and see the children and young people as 'experts in their own lives' (Clark and Moss, 2008, p.6).

#### **6.5.4 Concluding Comments**

As can be seen from my general observations in this activity, all of the groups were able to effectively undertake the task, albeit to varying degrees. Each group approached the activity in a similar way and systematically worked through the images one by one. The fact that none of the groups completed the task with a written commentary on all of the images was due to a lack of sufficient time. Notwithstanding these issues, the exercise revealed a number of interesting points that are as follows:

1. the children and young people were able to articulate a clear understanding of the various underlying social, moral and political messages and environmental factors
2. the children and young people were both comfortable and knowledgeable about expressing their views

### **6.6 Session Three**

#### **6.6.1 Activity 6 – Session Introduction and Narrative Discussion – Informed Consent and the Right to Withdraw**

At the beginning of this third Session, as well as presenting a brief overview of the progress made so far and what the next activities were going to include, I focused on the issue of informed consent for participating in the research process and confirmed that if they (the pupils) wished to they could withdraw, as I had organised for any pupil taking up this option to be placed in other classes throughout the school. I spoke about there not being any constraint on their ability to withdraw. In doing this, I placed particular importance on reassuring the pupils that their non-participation would not affect how they would be treated (Willow, 2002). I further drew attention to the research leaflet and high-lighted some of the key elements contained within it. I had wanted to gain the participating pupils' free and informed consent to carry out the remainder of the research, which according to Roberts-Holmes (2008, p. 60) 'is part of building trust in the relationship between yourself and the research participants'.

Following this, I spoke about what was remaining in the research IGWP and what their role was going to be - taking more control and showing their leadership. I set out what it was that I was hoping would be accomplished and what the benefits would be if they did opt to continue to be involved. I spoke with particular emphasis about the exercise of choice and the right to withdraw. I felt it was important to take time to high-light this element in my presentation to them, since I was conscious that hitherto the permission to proceed had been given by the head teacher as the 'gate-keeper'. Roberts-Holmes (2008, p.68) highlights the need for the researcher to continuously negotiate consent and the freedom to withdraw as it is not a 'one-off event but, rather, a dynamic and subtle process'.

Clearly, whilst I was aiming to try and keep the pupils' interest and involvement, I

was also conscious of the need to balance this with their ability to exercise freedom of choice because the right not to participate as frustrating as it might be for me, 'has to be respected' (Roberts-Holmes, 2008, p.68).

I recognised that my use of language was an important factor that I should seek to be 'jargon free', logical, clear and to ensure that I set out the 'pros' and 'cons' for maintaining involvement. In doing this, I reminded the pupils of the increase in skill base that they would gain, for example in listening skills, communication skills, presentation skills, cooperation through group-work and negotiation skills. I believe, I spoke fluently in an understandable and concise way and was aware of my intonation and pace, which was essential in order that the pupils could digest what I was communicating and to enable them to seek more clarification if they were unsure about anything. After I had finished, I gave the pupils a few minutes to consider and to allow time for them to make a decision to either stay involved or withdraw. I asked for pupils to speak with me directly if they wished to withdraw, so that I could understand their reason should they choose this option. In the event, none of the pupils took up the offer to withdraw.

### **6.6.2 Activity 7 – Role Play**

In this exercise, the class were reform again into their colour groups, whilst I handed out the role play activity sheet (Appendix 2). Each group was given 20 minutes to prepare their role play. Subsequently, I realised that this time scale was unrealistic as it took 30 minutes in reality. Each group was given a different role play scenario based on one of the three contextual settings, to prepare and to act out in front of their class peers. The group's presentation was to be based

on their own interpretation and creativity.

The three scenarios were:

- Green Group – In the organisational (school) setting. The group was asked to role play helping to choose some new library books for all ages
- Blue Group – In the community setting. The group was asked to role play accessing free swimming sessions at their local community swimming pool
- Red Group – In the leisure/social setting. The group was asked to arrange a youth group outing

Full details of the role play scenarios are detailed in the Pilot Study Appendix 4.

### **6.6.3 Green Group Analysis**

The Mosaic Approach (Clarke and Moss, 2008) discusses the use of role play as a means of bringing together a combination of narratives and imagination, which can help piece together, a 'greater level of understanding about young children's priorities'. The role play activity, in my view, demonstrated that children and young people do have a general understanding about how decisions are made and that they appreciate the different roles, powers and authority that adults have and that it is part of their conscious experience. It also revealed an insight into the fact that they genuinely believe that they, as children and young people, can exercise power, as expressed by the child actors in the Green group's scenario.

In this respect, they were able to assert why there should be interesting picture

books with a balance of non-academic fiction themes compared with the parent actors who insisted on having academic non-fictional books only. The actors who played children's roles were similarly able to demonstrate their ability to negotiate with the parent actors when taking into account the ideas for purchasing the books. This fact provides strong evidence that the pupils were not 'cocooned innocence' as regards their status, which Lee (2003, p.87) discusses. It also illustrated a wider understanding, based on their experiences as pretend care-givers (parents), which Lee (2003) asserts as tending to be one of preserving and controlling access to information, under the 'guise of protection' (James and James, 2004, p.36) or the authority of 'adults over children as a social category' (James and James, 2004, p.3) in the wider society. It indicated to me, that the pupils appeared to be aware of contemporary concerns and were able to voice these articulately, in a confident manner.

Furthermore, they were able to demonstrate a knowledge of the forms of adult conversation, which was clearly part of their lived experiences. I believe, this indicates their developing capacity to be able to communicate and participate in their social world (Tolfree and Woodhead, 1999). The multi-level approach of communication, listening, voice, dialogue and acting has helped me to appreciate that young citizens can 'understand their early childhood institutions and their experience' (Clarke and Moss, 2008, p.32) and are able to judge what is needed to obtain a good result. I am of the view that the members of the Green group had some experience of participating in decisions and this had come out during their role play.

#### 6.6.4 Blue Group Analysis

In my analysis of the Blue group, I believe, that the scenario provided, drew on aspects of everyday real life experiences as the young citizens sought to challenge the authority and power base of adults when controlling decisions. The plausible argument presented by the protester in regard to being able to keep-fit is, I believe, evidence of their awareness of the current issues surrounding obesity.

However, I recognise that their social reality is not fixed but is invariably a moving experiential target as they begin to acquire more tacit knowledge in lived experiences. For example, their 'social life is seen as being constantly created through the activities of social actors' (James and Prout, 1997, p.15). The apparent single-mindedness characterisation of the adult committee members revealed that young citizens are well aware of the power base of adults and is evidence of the 'preservation of adult's superiority as knowers' (Lee, 2003, p. 89). This is because young citizen's experiences and knowledge is, according to Bell (1995), in the control, to a large degree, of adults who often disrespect them and for the most part, considers young people to be less important than and inferior to adults.

The notion that a child's voice can be ignored, because it could 'always be replaced by a more reliable, adult source' (Lee, 2003, p.89) was perceivable in the role play, which portrayed the group's understanding of not being taken seriously by the adults. The form of dissenting voice according to James and Prout (1997, p14) challenges the orthodoxy of childhood as it 'might differ across

time or in space which began to destabilise traditional models of child development and socialization' (p.14).

The interest in children and young people as 'social actors' (James and Prout, 1997) and childhood as a particular kind of 'social reality' (James and Prout, 1997) became more noticeable in the role play as the group took responsibility for challenging what it conceived as a powerful institution - the community swimming committee, so that they, as young citizens, could be heard. The tokenistic nature of the agreement to grant 30 minutes free swimming time with a review period indicates a 'one-way informing' (Bovaird and Löffler, 2009, p.283) approach by those who played adult roles. This seems to indicate, I believe, that children are able to assimilate some of their lived experiences as an expression which typifies their social conditioning in institutionalised environments.

#### **6.6.5 Red Group Analysis**

The role play was heavy and confrontational in nature. The atmosphere was tense and uncomfortable to watch. There were some funny parts to the play but in my view the scenario was essentially unrealistic in nature. I felt the audience did not engage with the role play, despite times of laughter, and although the group did get a round of applause afterwards, this was muted. I think the group had not planned sufficiently enough for the presentation and did not seem to have any real purpose. There was less dialogue and a lot of wasted time in parts. Those parts of the role play that were plausible appeared to be overshadowed by the complicated nature of the role play itself. The power dimensions between the youth group leaders and youth group members seemed

un-reconcilable and not synonymous with real life experiences. The group, in my view, lost their way in executing the role play as a means of making decisions. In this instance, I believe, the nature of the role play was not a reflection of their experiences, but rather more a lack of planning and preparation.

#### **6.6.6 Concluding Comments**

The aim of the role play exercise was to determine if children and young people could understand and take responsibility for making decisions through assimilation and to see if they could demonstrate a persuasive influence in the decision making process with adults. It is evident that children and young people were able to do this, although to varying degrees. Nevertheless, all of the pupils entered into the spirit of the role play and presented some plausible scenarios. In all cases, the roles played by adult actors demonstrated a certain characterised view of the way children and young people often might see adult behaviour towards them. It was evident from the scenarios, that children and young people do see adults as refusing to change by the way they portrayed the adults in a superior and authoritarian manner. This affirms the view, I feel, that there is good evidence to suggest that some adults do need to be 're-educated, so that they can become a positive force and influence in children and young peoples lives' (Willow, 2002, p.50).

The role play activity has proved invaluable and has provided another dimension to the way children and young people see their interactive relationship with adults. The role play exercise has demonstrated, I believe, a capacity and capability in children and young people to participate in decisions. It is clear that



they have a strong desire to try and influence decisions and to assert this, whilst negotiating within an often reluctant or oppressive adult environment in which their role is not usually acknowledged and valued.

## **6.7 Session Four**

### **6.7.1 Activity 8 – Create your own Activity – Plan, Deliver and Evaluate**

At the outset of the eighth activity, I provided a detailed explanation and gave an opportunity for the pupils to ask questions or seek any points of clarification. The purpose of this activity was to test out whether the pupils had the necessary skills and ability to undertake, deliver and evaluate an activity of their design, within a small limited number of defined parameters. The activity empowered each group (Blue, Red and Green) with the full responsibility for creating the form of the activity, the manner in which they should implement it, as well as establishing any organisational structures that they required in order to deliver it successfully. Finally, they were required to set out an evaluation not only of their own performance but also that of the other groups. As with the previous activities, the class teacher, teaching assistant and I aided one of the three groups.

The activity parameters were set out as follows:

- Each group would be allocated 30 minutes to plan their activity, which should be presented to the whole class for participation
- The activity (of their choice) must include everyone in the group, and function within the ground rules for the class, including the need to consider health and safety issues

- Every pupil must understand their group's activity so as to be able to deliver it as a group to the whole class
- The activity should be no longer than 10 minutes in duration
- An introduction to the activity should be provided which explains what is involved and what is expected of the participants
- At the end of the activity everyone was to evaluate the other group's performances and that the group itself should evaluate its own performance
- The activity should be enjoyable and not be too complicated
- The use of props could be made from the physical education resources, for example, bean bags, hula-hoops, balls, sacks, skittles etc.

The detailed account of each of the group's performance and evaluation commentaries are set out in the Pilot Study Appendix 4.

Within the evaluation sheet that I had designed, I set out the following three distinct questions:

1. How did your group decide the activity and what did you want to achieve by the end?
2. How well do you think your group did in the activity? (I provided three face judgement options based on the sad, satisfied or smiley face rating, which I felt would be easily understood by the children and young people due to their pictorial format which the participants had experience of using in their school work evaluation processes)

3. What would you do differently if you were to do the activity again?

The reason for seeking a response to these questions was to find out if the pupils had the ability to evaluate their own performance, to make judgements about the other group's performances and in order to see how they were able to express their views and opinions constructively.

By means of a short discussion, I encouraged the pupils to take responsibility for completing the individual evaluation forms in a respectful and objective manner. Kirby et al. (2003) has found that children and young people can engage with the notion of participatory rights, decision-making and being listened to when they are given their say in decisions. He also believes that they can differentiate and understand the decision making processes of others. Consequently, active participation can be understood in the context of an interconnectivity of relations between the adult and child/young person.

It was this interconnectivity that I particular wished to see as one of the activity outcomes. The negativity experienced by some pupils, which has emerged through the research, in the decision making process within the school context has, I believe, affected self-esteem. This has the potential danger of setting them up to fail because they may not see themselves as sufficiently competent, confident and valuable contributors. This activity was an attempt to provide a forum to investigate these issues and to evaluate the achievements arising from their decisions.

In my own evaluation of this session, I was less concerned with the descriptive

nature of the actual activities undertaken by each group, or with their various degrees of success, than I was about drawing out the underlying skills that are needed to ensure success. Amongst these skills, I developed the following list against which I sought to analyse the outcomes:

- Self-assurance and confidence
- Perception, sensitivity and discernment
- Creativity
- Personal and collective authority and responsibility
- Intellectual curiosity and entrepreneurialism
- Reliable logical thought and democratic judgement
- Sound reflective objectivity
- Receptiveness
- A level of sophistication and relative maturity
- Self-regulation - being proactive and responsive to achieving the requirements of the task

These skills are as much evident where the group has been successful as they are where they have been less successful. That said, I was pleased that at least one group was able to show that the exercise could be completed successfully, since it validated my own belief that this could be the case. Equally, at no point did the pupils ever suggest that this exercise was beyond their capabilities. Even where they acknowledged a failure there was no doubt that this could have been overcome.

Indeed, this very fact leads me to conclude that the pupils displayed a high level

of self-assurance and confidence. Thus, within the exercise as a whole, I have been able to identify all of the skills, which I have defined as essential for ensuring effective involvement in decision making activities. Even though the Green group, who succeeded in completing the activity, failed in keeping within the ground rules and did not include all of the class in their activity, they were, nonetheless, able to demonstrate, I believe, that they could operate at a level akin to Hart's (1992) participation ladder's 7<sup>th</sup> rung, which is designated as 'child-initiated and directed'.

Central to the promotion of engagement is the need for effective empowerment. Hart's ladder (1992) describes eight stages of participation with children and young people beginning with 'Manipulation' (1) and ending in 'Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults' (8), which illustrate a movement towards greater empowerment and respect for children and young people in the participation process. There is of course, always a dependence upon the circumstances in which the participation is taking place and the maturity of the children and young people involved.

Consequently, as with this exercise, there was invariably a need to work within certain constraints. The IGWP could only take place, for example, within a set period of time (1.5 hours). Fajerman and Treseder (2004) state that such barriers to empowerment will 'manifest themselves differently in every organisation, depending on the existing power structure and the individuals involved' (p.27). The time constraint was identified by a number of pupils in their evaluation statements. I recognise that a further empowerment might have resulted from my

first seeking to obtain the pupils' opinion on how much time they believed was required to complete the activity. Equally, it may have been possible to have given the time keeping control over to the pupils in some form. Consequently, where engagement and participation enterprise is to be developed there is a need to reflect carefully on the extent of any constraints and to determine whether they can be overcome.

### **6.7.2 On Completion of the Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP)**

As part of the research methodology, I wanted to ensure that the pupils had the opportunity to develop their presentational and problem solving skills so that they could gain from being involved in the research through 'learning predominantly by discovery techniques' (Bennett, 1976, p.38). In order to acknowledge this learning, I provided all participating pupils with a Certificate on completion of the IGWP, which outlined what they had been involved in and what skill-set they had developed. This included their 'participation in curriculum planning' (Bennett, 1976, p.38).

## **6.8 Staff Survey Questionnaires**

The design of the questionnaire, which is located in Appendix 5 was composed in the following four parts:

1. Background details – Staff roles, gender, age and ethnicity
2. Four introductory questions – with a 1 - 5 scale of tick box response
3. Four intermediate questions – with 'yes/no/don't know' response and an 'If yes/no' short explanation request

#### 4. Two concluding questions – seeking an expression of opinions

The questionnaire format and size was aimed at being completed within a 15 minutes time scale and was issued to all members of the organisations staff, including teaching, support and volunteer personnel. In total, 20 replies were returned; of which 6 were partially completed (5 did not answer questions 9 and 10). Notwithstanding these gaps, the total number of responses was, I felt, very positive and was, in part, due to the enthusiasm that the head teacher had shown for the research. Appendix 4, Part 5 (Table 1.25 - 1.27) sets out a detailed account of the questionnaire responses and analysis. This information tabulates the responses for each of the specific teaching or non-teaching roles numbered 1 - 20, categories as Ancillary/Volunteer Staff, Teaching Assistants and Teacher. Table 6.18 illustrates an analysis of the questionnaire data responses provided, which is cross referenced against their roles, age, and gender. In addition, to the quantitative data collected, I have also set out an individual commentary for each of the questions in order to provide a qualitative interpretation.

### Table 6.18 - Questionnaire Response Analysis

	1	9	16	18	19	20	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12	13	14	15	17
Question 8																				
	Y	DK	N	DK	DK	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	Y	Y	DK	DK	DK	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Question 7																				
	N	DK	N	DK		Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	N	N	DK	DK	DK	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Question 6																				
	N	DK	DK	DK	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK	DK	N	Y	DK	DK	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	DK
Question 5												X								
	Y	Y	N	DK	DK	Y	Y	DK	N	DK	Y	Y	DK	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	DK	Y
Question 4	X				X					X			X		X					
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Question 3		X	X				X	X	X		X							X	X	X
	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	3	2
Question 2				X																
	1	2	2	2	4	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Question 1														X		X	X			
	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1

QUESTIONNAIRE NUMBER

ANCILLARY / VOLUNTEER STAFF	TEACHING ASSISTANTS	TEACHERS
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AGE X

Over 60

51 - 60

41 - 50

31 - 40

22 - 30

Under 21

**QUESTIONS 1-4    ANSWERS 1/2/3/4/5**

**QUESTIONS 5 - 8      ANSWERS Y = YES / N = NO / DK = DON'T KNOW**

MALE

FEMALE



### **6.8.1 Questionnaire Concluding Analysis**

Taken as a whole, I believe, the results of the questionnaire reveals a growing awareness of the benefits that can be obtained from promoting children and young people's participation in decisions, with a clear majority in favour, although it is evident that the impact of these benefits at present are not fully recognisable across the whole school. This fact would appear to be derived from an uncertainty about whether there are any real advantages to be gained from promoting participation, as well as how effective any advantages might be for both the school and the pupils in terms of better outcomes. Whilst there was some recognition that children and young people could bring value to the participation and involvement process, most responses took the view that the issue of value lay mainly in the potential for increasing the pupils' personal and individual development.

Notably, there was a definite indication that an adult orientated perspective was very much in evidence. For example, the deputy head teacher (No. 15) only provided one fully affirmative response to questions 1 – 8, and elected not to provide any answers to questions 9 and 10. Although, two teachers (No. 8 and 10) provided very few affirmative responses and corresponding comments, it could be argued that their responses more accurately revealed a certain ignorance and/or lack of awareness of the currency of children and young people's engagement agenda. There was clear evidence, for example, to show that the majority of teaching assistants seemed to have an obvious lack of awareness of the participation agenda, which was similar to the non-teaching members of staff.

Nevertheless, the final impression given was that the school, as a whole, did have a value base which sought to promote this agenda. This was predominantly achieved through the leadership of the head teacher, even though there was evidence of a lack of understanding on how the agenda might be achieved or where the main focus of development might lie, which was supported with a real sense of purpose and direction.

I was nonetheless, impressed with how enthusiastic the head teacher was for the participation agenda and how much he was endeavouring to promote its value across the teaching and non-teaching staff within the school. From the outset, the head teacher was very keen to learn from the outcomes of the research so that he could report directly to the governing body. I prepared an initial report (Appendix 5) soon after completing the pilot study and met with the head teacher to go through its contents, my findings and suggested areas of improvement.

The head teacher was pleased with the report, which demonstrated with evidence that the school was trying to actively promote the participation agenda. Included within the report, were some indications of where and how improvements could be made in the future. It was agreed that I would go back to the school to present the findings of the whole research once it was completed.

## **6.9 Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three members of the teaching staff - the head teacher (main gate-keeper), the School Council's lead teacher and the class teacher for the year 6 pupils who participated in the fieldwork. All

of the interviews were audio taped and fully transcribed. However, in order to undertake the interviews and to comply with the ethical considerations of the interviewee, it was necessary to confirm that the information obtained would remain confidential. It is, therefore, not possible to provide an example of the transcribed interview records in the appendices.

Each of the interviewees, in signing the consent form for the interview, gave authorisation, however, for a summary of the transcripts to be recorded. These details are set out in Appendix 4, Part 5, in Table 1.18. This table provides a summary of each question posed together with the individual interviewee's responses, a commentary against each response and an overall analysis commentary. Alongside the tabulation record, I have also provided a qualitative narrative account of the semi-structured interview question responses.

### **6.9.1 Semi-Structured Interview Analysis**

The various responses to the questions have provided an interesting insight into how the teaching staff viewed their current experiences and involvement in the work of developing and promoting the participation agenda for pupils in the school decision making processes. The head teacher was able to articulate the difficulties he has faced in taking the agenda forward, both in terms of the staff who had mixed feelings and views on the subject, and on the impact on the curriculum timetable. He recognised the importance of advancing the participation of pupils within the life of the school so as to increase their experiences. In this, it was clear that he struggled to balance this desire with the reality of needing to bring a clearly defined whole school management strategy to

effect the change needed. He was willing to challenge the current position, but acknowledged that it would take time to change current staff customs and practices. I got the firm impression that the head teacher was willing to address this position in time, but that as a newly appointed head, he wanted to settle into his role first, before taking the agenda forward.

The lead teacher had the responsibility for implementing and managing the School Council. During discussion, after one of the School Council meetings, she acknowledged that she had not had any formal training prior to undertaking the role of lead teacher and that she had been given the responsibility with only a half a day a month allocation/release from teaching commitments to carry out this duty. It emerged, through the interview process, that whilst she was doing the best she could, she had very little understanding of what was possible to achieve from the pupils' participation involvement, which was not helped by the short period of staff allocated time.

This, I believe, accounted for some of the limitation in her answers to the questions posed, which predominately related to the School Council process, as she was not able to think wider in terms of the creative nature of how the participation agenda could be implemented more fully across the whole school setting. She was, however, able to reflect on the fact that not all staff members had the same enthusiasm for the agenda and therefore had not aided its implementation.

From the various activities undertaken by the School Council, it can be seen that

they generally correspond to Hart's (2002) first 4 rungs of his participation ladder. It is clear, however, that there is progress being made to raise the degree of participation towards the higher rungs, for example, in the pupil led uniform changes, although such examples are somewhat sporadic and go unnoticed.

The interview with the class teacher was strained, as she was not willing to share her views easily. In my subsequent reflection, I was surprised by this, especially since she had been fully supportive of the IGWP and had in fact been involved in the research planning process. It was also evident that she was not always clear when responding to some of the questions compared to the other two interviewees. As a result, the interview was uncomfortable for me to undertake, and I found myself compensating for her reluctance to answer questions fully and I had the strong impression that she possibly had an aversion to being interviewed in a recorded manner. In order to help, I posed more follow-up questions.

I also recognised afterwards that I tended to 'latch-onto' what she had said, rather than actually keeping to the semi-structured interview process, which I had aimed to do. I recognise that I was a little nervous during this interview process as it was in fact my first semi-structured interview and therefore, in the subsequent interviews, I implemented small changes to help the interviewees be more relaxed. This involved having a dialogue off audio tape with the interviewee prior to turning on the tape, which seemed to work better in all the proceeding interviews.

### 6.9.2 Concluding Comments

In the light of my analysis from reviewing the interviews, I am of the view, that they all wanted to address the participation agenda within the school setting, even though their approaches were from slightly different perspectives in relation to their individual roles and responsibilities. It was evident that they each experienced some resistance from other staff members, which hindered the participation agenda with the pupils. It is difficult to assess whether the school will be able to move forward from where it currently is without a fuller ownership across the whole staff team, governing body as well as from local community representatives, such as the local parish priest and volunteers.

The short term need to satisfy the school's curriculum agenda in meeting the citizenship requirements is unfortunately an all too easy point at which to consider the exercise to have reached a close. The school needs rather to have more substantive longer term goals if they are to properly make progress in advancing the participation of children and young people into a meaningful way. I believe, however, that the head teacher is the key individual who has the capability, enthusiasm and authority to bring about the change needed to drive forward a more fully effective response to pupil participation.

From my evaluation of the adult questionnaires and semi-structured interview data, I was able to see that all of the adults, whatever their role within the school setting, respected children and young people. Equally, it was evident that the school was having some successes in its participation agenda. The pupils' involvement in the school council provided evidence that they were able to impact

on a number of decisions which affected their lives, for example, in relation to the school uniform and playground equipment decisions. The pupils themselves, however, did raise concerns in their IGWP recorded data, that often the adults do not always respond appropriately or help them sufficiently to participate effectively in decisions. From the contents of the semi-structured interviews, it is clear that some staff members are not always fully aware of how important it is to relate and respond to young citizens.

From my interpretivist perspective, these responses have reinforced my view that some of the adults experience an 'awkwardness' in how they interact with children and young people. This 'awkwardness' stems, in my opinion, from a lack of understanding, skills and awareness for the capabilities that children and young people have the ability to engage in. As a result, the adults inability to relate can fail to create an effective response and this can lead to young citizens expressing the view that adults do not listen effectively to them. It is, however, clear that the principle motivation of the adults is one of benevolence, in which they genuinely desire greater engagement, but often simply fail to act convincingly.

### **6.9.3 Semi-structured Interview Modifications**

In light of the experience of the interview process, I subsequently made the following changes to improve the interview process for the main case study:

- I extended the range of the questions which could be used during a semi-structured interviews

- I sought to make interviewees feel more relaxed off audio-tape prior to formally commencing the interview recordings
- I agreed with all the interviewees that they could indicate by putting their hand up, if at any point they wanted to stop audio-taping. This proved very valuable in some of the interviews in order to facilitate clarification
- I provided each interviewee with a list of possible questions prior to the interview so that they could see what matters would be discussed

### **6.10 Organisation Literature Review**

The organisational literature obtained from the school consisted of a report on how the School Council had been set up and operated since 2007. This report makes reference to a government website <http://www.schoolcouncil.org>, which was used to obtain initial guidance and procedures. In the first part of the report the following statement of intent and aims are set out:

#### **Statement of Intent**

- St. T's Council is intended to improve the life of the school and to help prepare pupils for adulthood through involvement in a democratic process. It is also intended to make an important contribution to raising standards in all aspects of school life.

#### **Aims**

The School Council will:

- Develop individual and collective responsibility
- Involve pupils in the maintenance and development of the school
- Improve pupil motivation and self esteem



- Provide a means of formal communication between pupils and staff
- Develop and improve pupil skills of
  - (i) Decision making
  - (ii) Speaking, listening and debate

The report confirms that following its establishment, individual class elections took place to elect a single male and female from each class to act as representatives on the Council, with the exception of the reception class. During 2008/09 there had been 4 meetings of the School Council with follow-up meetings held with the head teacher. With the exception of a number of improvement issues at the end of the report, the documents sets out the matters discussed and the outcomes achieved during this period.

The key principles and aims of the School Council, as sets out in the report, forms the basis upon which the School has sought to utilise the School Council forum as a means of implementing and developing pupil engagement and participation. It can be noted from these records, that in terms of the actual influence that the pupils have had on the school's decisions, these, whilst good, are essentially related to peripheral matters and are not issues that really affect raising standards, which was one of the main goals that New Labour wished to promote.

As a consequence, there is, I believe, a need for the school to formulate a more comprehensive policy document to include a constitution, which clearly defines the powers and the rights of the children and young people to be included in school development issues that can impact positively on service improvements.

It is also apparent that there is only a small amount of information provided by the website to support and guide the advancement of the participation agenda and processes, which is clearly inadequate. As a result, there is a vital need for more training and practical information aimed at providing a more effective platform for advancing these developments.

### **6.11 Pilot Study Concluding Summary**

The pilot study methodology, content and data analysis, which I developed to provide an innovative means of investigating the experiences, views and capabilities of children and young people aged 11 - 12 years has, I believe, proved both effective and surprising. Indeed the degree of surprise does, to some extent, demonstrate in itself an aspect of innovation, which seeks to break new ground or uncover new means through which it is possible to see the forms of reality that exist for the children and young people themselves. For example, Activity 2 - a reflective exercise on being listened to, revealed a new objective means of understanding the distinction in communication that exists in participatory dialogue between that which is largely '*instructive*', and that which is mainly '*expressive*' in nature.

As a consequence of this new insight, it was necessary for me to add to my fieldwork investigation a further exercise, which sought to evaluate and affirm the development of this possible new paradigm, by means of a comparative control analysis programme, with fellow professionals who work directly with children and young people. This discovery has also helped to expand the critique of Hart's (2002) Participation Ladder. Similarly, Activity 1 - that explored ground rules, also

provided an unforeseen outcome within the categorisation patterns that emerged, generating as they did, an awareness of the importance of respect, inclusion and order. Activity 3 - that looked at the pupils' emotional response to being listened to, also generated unforeseen category data, which led to a focus on the need for adults to respect, relate and to respond to children and young people with greater effect.

Together with these particular distinctions, the other activities enabled me to assess the capacity of the young citizens to function within a decision making environment in which they were the main actors. As a consequence, it was possible to more fully appreciate the knowledge and understanding of current social and environmental issues that young citizens have. Equally, it was possible to recognise their sound ability to express ideas, views and opinions, to work within and manage the complex interconnections that exist in the dynamics of dialogue, decision making and critical evaluation processes and in undertaking implementation strategies and delivery actions. The level of skills, confidence and values revealed significant competencies, originality and effectiveness and supported the premise that active engagement with children and young people ought to be fostered and developed regardless of the setting.

The decision to focus on the three particular contextual settings - organisation (school), community, leisure/social, has proved to be very successful in allowing the pupils to speak freely, uninhibited and within their real life experiences. The use of these three settings also helped to provide a consistent link between each of the activities in their format, which enabled the children and young people to

become familiar with this aspect of the field work. Notably, there were only a small number of no responses within these settings.

In addition, the production and child orientated presentation of the research material — children's information leaflet, PowerPoint presentation and activity sheets, etc, which emphasised the collaborative nature of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) created an effective delivery mechanism and platform that helped carry the various activities through to their completion. That said, the experience brought about by the pilot study activities, has enabled me to reflect critically on certain development needs. These have included, the addition of the aspect of rights and responsibilities in the ground rules in Activity 1, changes to the questions in Activity 3, to enable a greater exploration of the issues surrounding respect, relate and respond and in simplifying the circle time discussion questions in Activity 4.

From the analysis of the adult questionnaire responses, the staff's experiences and views, which demonstrated a wide and mixed opinion, lacked, in my view, strategic direction and agreed goals. Much of the focus was centred on the School Council, and whilst this revealed encouraging signs of commitment to and the valuing of participation. Based on the issues arising from the children and young people's responses within the IGWP, I felt it was important to tune the questions towards exploring more directly the issues of respect, relate and respond within the case study settings questionnaires. This process afforded the opportunity to adjust the presentational style of the questionnaire document to make it more succinct and simpler in form (an A3 folded to A4 booklet).

The semi-structured interviews expanded upon the general thrust arising from the questionnaires and provided a clearer picture of the inconsistencies and level of belief in the values associated with promoting and furthering the participation agenda within the school environment.

### **6.12 A Paradigm Shift**

In concluding the pilot study investigation and analysis, which was developed in response to the various issues that had emerged from the literature and policy reviews, I have been able to articulate a shift in the paradigm surround 'adultism' (Bell, 2009) and its impact on participation with children and young people. From the 'adultism' conceptual framework/perspective, it was seen that it is largely based on the assumption that all adults behave negatively towards children and young people. This is derived from a position of a deliberate or assumed superiority and tends towards an oppressive, disregard and mistreatment of children and young people. Hart (2002) takes this perspective and explores the manner in which the 'adultism' actions can be differentiated and categorised within a participatory ladder. But what he does not do is to challenge the cause of the core attitudes associated with 'adultism' traits.

The paradigm shift that I am proposing begins, I believe, from a different perspective, which acknowledges that for the most part adults act in a benevolent way towards children and young people and where they fail to participate effectively it is because they have lost the ability, skills and awareness to relate properly to them. As a consequence, the issue of disrespect for children and young people arises, which is caused by a general lack of engagement

experience that would otherwise demonstrate the benefits that could be gained from the unique perspective that young citizens can bring to the decision making table. Advancement in these areas of communication will bring with them new outcomes that will positively impact upon children and young people, such that they will be able to see a more meaningful and valued response to their participation involvement.

It is my contention, therefore, that there is a need to further shift the 'adultism' paradigm towards a model which recognises and explicitly focuses on the way adults feel 'awkward' in respecting, relating and responding to children and young people — a model, which I have termed the '*Three R's of Awkwardness*'.

Intrinsic to my assessment of this shift, is the view that it remains a complex phenomena. Consequently, in the main case study research, I will endeavour to draw greater distinction and definition to the *Three R's - respect, relate and respond*. Not, in order to move my underlying philosophical stance from an interpretive post-positive position to a positive one, which seeks to remove the 'messiness' (Grix 2004, p.82) of the complexity by seeking rules and laws so as to render the phenomena understandable but rather to maintain a certain open-endedness, which will continue to be moved by the input of the children and young people as further experiences through participation and engagement takes place.

In the next chapter, I will set out the data analysis arising from the main case study investigations, highlighting the key factors that expands the initial pilot study research findings.

## CHAPTER 7

### CASE STUDY FIELDWORK

*“The origin and development of pupil voice has its roots predominantly in the twentieth century. Children in the nineteenth century were considered to be passive, silent, compliant, submissive and incompetent spectators in life events” (Cheminais, 2008, p.5).*

#### 7.1 Introduction

I had always viewed the pilot study to be a rehearsal of the main case study investigation and it was not necessary, therefore, for the pilot study to have been so productive, although in fact, the study has shown itself to be much more decisive. Yin's (2003b) advice that it may be necessary to invest a significant amount of resource to the pilot study has certainly proved to be accurate. As a result, the design of the pilot study interactive group work programme (IGWP), set out in the previous chapter, has been more innovative and effective in acting as a spring-board to facilitate the children and young peoples' responses that were integral to Participatory Action Research (PAR) than I had first envisaged. Certainly, I could not have predicted the emergence of the new categorisation as I have termed them of '*instructive*' and '*expressive*' forms of dialogue. Equally, the various activities, responses and evaluative analysis has enabled me to identify and propose a new shift in the paradigm on adultism, from which I have formulated the '*Three R's of Awkwardness - Respect, Relate and Respond*'. Additionally, I have reflected more critically on Hart's (2002) participation ladder.

Having identified this shift, the task now was to set in place the changes to the

research programme that would enable a further examination and evaluation analysis to occur, whilst maintaining and continuing to develop the group work PAR activities to foster and generate, if at all possible, further ‘surprises’.

The contents of this chapter should be read in conjunction with Appendix 6 as reference will be made to specific tables in the narrative provided.

## **7.2 Modifications following the Pilot Study**

From the experience gained in undertaking the pilot study, I have been able to refine a number of key changes. The first of these was to bolster and strengthen the power dynamic associated with the children and young people’s ability to more fully exercise a definitive choice as to whether they wished to participate or to withdraw from the proposed research activities. I felt that this was essential, since it was intrinsic to the fundamental values of participation and the corresponding ethical demands, upon which the research was founded, to ensure maximum freedom in this respect. Consequently, I sought the co-operation of the case study organisations to support me by providing an introductory session to the research and in the provision of alternative activities for those who wished to decline. As a result, the children and young people, who were in the designated age group within the case study organisations, were invited to attend the introduction sessions (if they wanted to) to find out more about the research. To this end, I sent out a significant number of introductory letters and invitations (Appendix 1), which for each of the organisation were as follows:

- Case study 1 - the LAC/RoC; 210 invitations were sent out by post to all



children in the age range across the Birmingham area, which was arranged as a separate evening session.

- Case study 2 - the IGS; 60 invitations were sent out to girls in the age range inviting them to attend an information session run in the school hall over a lunch time period.
- Case study 3 - the MMYG; 42 invitations were sent out requesting boys within the age range to come to an induction session, which took place as part of the youth group's normal evening programme.

The emphasis placed on having a real choice on the part of the participants, meant that I had to assert, at times uncomfortably, this principle with the gate-keepers, which also extended to the children and young people having the right to refuse to attend the initial information session in the first place. At the information session, I reinforced the choice that the participants were making by providing an expression of interest sheet, which included a statement that they would be willing to attend all of the research sessions. In addition, at the first session of the IGWP, I provided a supplementary individualised consent form (Appendix 1), which I took them through stage by stage to ensure that they fully understood their involvement expectations (including the right to withdraw), responsibilities and agreement.

The added emphasis placed on creating a definitive induction stage was supported with a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 2) and in handing out the information leaflet (Appendix 3) that I had developed to show, in a colourful and

exciting way, what my research was about, who I was and what my role as the researcher was aiming to achieve. I particularly highlighted the benefits that each individual young person would gain, should they decide to participate in the research. I also provided incentives, by indicating that at the end of the process each child would receive a certificate of attendance, which would outline the skill base that they would have gained from their involvement in the research. This certificate of attendance could also be added to their record of achievement portfolio. Added to this, each child would receive a small gift from me personally by way of a thank you (i.e. a bar of chocolate, or similar). Finally, at this induction meeting, I provided the opportunity for the children and young people to ask questions and to emphasise that they could seek points of clarification throughout the process. Central to my presentation, was the fact that their participation was very much valued and was in many ways an adventure with choice.

In terms of the participatory activities, I adapted Activity 1, which centred on the ground rules, to include the need to identify the additional factors associated with responsibilities and rights. Activity 3, which focused on the emotional context generated by both positive and negative engagement experiences, was extended to include a further discussion that was more directly related to the issues associated with respecting, relating and responding. Activity 4 - the circle time discussion, became an integral part of the discussion forums that were undertaken throughout the IGWP exercises. Therefore, there was no requirement to have a separate activity for this component of the IGWP. I also modified Activity 5, to remove the added complexity of relating the 32 images to all 3 settings – organisation, community and leisure/social. In addition, Activity 6

was no longer required because the issues regarding consent were incorporated into the induction session. In Activity 7 - the role play, I made changes to facilitate greater flexibility and freedom for the participants to choose the context. In Activity 8, I sought to identify a more detailed assessment of the 10 skill set list within a matrix format. Finally, the adult questionnaire survey (Appendix 1) was modified in order to redraft it to include a greater focus on the issues of respecting, relating and responding, whilst at the same time creating a questionnaire which was simpler in its presentational format.

It was my desire to ensure that the research process was as accessible as possible to all and that there was a genuine choice in the way participants were involved in the research, with everyone (both adults and children) feeling valued for their contribution and that their involvement was understood as a two-way process. I wanted to assist all the case study settings gain a greater insight into how the rights of children, with respect to participation, might be advanced and that the children and young people would see that they would acquire new communication and participation skills through their involvement.

With the benefit of the pilot study experience, which had helped draw out in my view a new paradigm shift, I was, in addition to the changes outlined above, able to adapt the various participatory activities to better suit each of the case study settings and circumstances and to focus the research towards a more finely tuned examination of the issues that had been brought out in the pilot study analysis. In making these changes, however, it was still essential that I should provide the opportunity to see if further new data emerged from the experiences

arising from the particular children and young people and adults being engaged within the case study organisational settings.

### **7.3 Organisational Case Study Settings**

Having made these adjustments, I proceeded with the case study settings in the following organisations, each of which was also located in the Birmingham area:

- Case study setting 1 – Looked After Children/RoC (LAC/RoC)
- Case study setting 2 - Independent Girl's School (IGS)
- Case study setting 3 - Male Muslim Youth Group (MMYG)

In all of the case study settings, additional important characteristics needed to be considered. For example, the programme activities needed to be undertaken in the evening in case study settings 1 and 3 and as a consequence this presented different challenges in the exercise management delivery. In addition, in the LAC/RoC group, the participants attendance was dependent upon a supervised taxi service as well as the need to include the provision for refreshments and hot food. In the MMYG, it was necessary to conduct the IGWP in the middle of the normal three hours youth group period. Within the IGS setting, the main constraint was that the activities had to be conducted during a 45 minute lunch time period over eight weeks.

A key concern at the initiation of the research process in each case study was to establish trust from the participating organisation. To this end, I had to be confident in my own approach. Equally, it was important to also establish this same level of trust, creativity and confidence with the children and young people

who were going to be participating in the IGWP. The introductory session helped a lot in this respect.

As a doctoral researcher working within a participatory methodology, I had to apply a level of flexibility, since it was integral to my approach that I adjust to respondents' and participants' experiences and perspectives. At times, the planned process for the IGWP was difficult and needed to slow down in order to take account of some set backs that could not have been foreseen or controlled at the initiation of the research programme. For example, more time was required in the LAC/RoC and MMYG's to complete some of the activities. In addition, I had to explain far more than I had anticipated to these groups in order for them to fully understand what I was asking them to do in a particular exercise.

It was also necessary to allow more time for group work discussions utilising the circle time method in which the children and young people debated the participation issues. During some of the activities, I had to allow for a longer time frame to enable the children and young people to form, norm and perform (Douglas, 1996) the task they were undertaking. I realised from experience of the pilot study that I had not given sufficient time to allow feedback to the whole group during circle time and plenary sessions, in which it was essential to equip the young citizens with motivational 'pep' talks to encourage them, build up their confidence and help aid their understanding.

#### **7.4 Summary of Case Study Organisations and Fieldwork**

The following table, 7.1 – Summary of Case Study Organisations and Field Work,

sets out an overview of each of the fieldwork settings (colour coded with acronyms), the numbers of participants involved, the numbers of adult questionnaire returns obtained and the staff semi-structured interviews carried out. The table indicates that a total of 94 children and young people participated in the whole of the research study and that 35 questionnaires were returned with 13 semi-structured interviews conducted.

**Table 7.1 - Summary of Case Study Organisations and Field Work**

Participating Case Study	Organisation	Number of Children/Young People & Age Range	Number of Questionnaire Returns	Number of Semi-structured Interviews
Exploratory Information Gathering Session	Voluntary Group	13 children/young people Aged 11 – 17 yrs	0	0
Pilot Study	Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant Primary School St T.	30 children/young people Aged 11 – 12 yrs	20	3
Case Study 1	Looked After Children (LAC/RoC)	9 children/young people Aged 11 – 15 yrs	2	5
Case Study 2	Independent Girl's School (IGS)	20 children/young people Aged 12 – 14 yrs	7	3
Case Study 3	Male Muslim Youth Group (MMYG)	22 children/young people Aged 11 – 16 yrs	6	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>13</b>

### **7.5 Activity 1 - Determining the Ground Rules, Rights and Responsibilities**

During the first session of the IGWP in each of the case study organisations, the participating children and young people were asked to devise their own ground rules, rights and responsibilities. In undertaking this modified exercise, I was

keen to capture not only what the young citizens understood about what rules ought to apply but I also to explore how they understood the notion of what rights they possessed and what responsibilities they felt they had (Hartas, 2008, p.95). Table 7.2 (Appendix 6) illustrates the data that has been recorded for each of the three case study settings, and includes the various statements presented by the groups.

### **7.5.1 Activity 1 - Analysis**

In undertaking my analysis in this exercise, I have included the pilot study data to present it together across all settings. Table 7.3 incorporates this additional information by utilising the pilot study categories of respect, inclusion and order. The results show many similarities in the various responses given, particularly in the respect and inclusion categories across the case study settings. The input from the IGS in the rules category was, however, much less. The reason for this, I would surmise, was because the school environment provided its own set of rules which control conduct and order and which were not so evident within the non formal settings (MMYG and LAC/RoC). Where the pupils in the pilot study have identified rules that relate to the category of order, these in my view, could sensibly be seen as the typical norms that would maintain an appropriate level of conduct. Notwithstanding, the assessment revealed a level of consistency in approach and application across the variety of sociological backgrounds.

When looking at the data gathered in Table 7.2 (Appendix 6), which identifies the case study responses to the issues of rules, responsibilities and rights, it can be seen that there are also similarities. For example, it is possible to identify the

Table 7.3 – Pilot Study and all Case Study Settings - Analysis of the Ground Rules

ACTIVITY 1											
PILOT STUDY AND ALL CASE STUDY SETTINGS - ANALYSIS OF THE GROUND RULES											
RESPECT				INCLUSION				ORDER			
Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG	Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG	Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG
Don't laugh at other peoples' ideas	No cheekiness	To listen to each other	To listen to each other	Don't argue or laugh at or verbally bully other children and young people	To work as a team	To take turns	No racism	To have fun!	No swearing	To have fun but to stay focused and be sensible	No swearing
Have respect for other ideas opinions	To have respect	To respect your elders and everyone	Don't be nasty	Everyone to join in and feel included	To engage and support each other in the group work in activities and discussion	To let everyone have a fair chance to speak	No bullying	Explain and answer fully	No fighting		No smoking on the premises
To listen – don't speak if someone else is. Don't talk	To seek clarification	To respect peoples wishes	Treat others as you want to be treated	Support each other		To get everyone involved		Tell the truth	To only use your mobile phone in an emergency		Not allowed in prohibited areas
Confidentiality – personal to <u>this</u> group	No talking when others are talking	To treat people as you want to be treated	Respect each other	Be prepared to share				Keep to time limits	To stick to the rules		No violence



Table 7.3 – Pilot Study and all Case Study Settings - Analysis of the Ground Rules

ACTIVITY 1												
PILOT STUDY AND ALL CASE STUDY SETTINGS - ANALYSIS OF THE GROUND RULES												
RESPECT				INCLUSION				ORDER				
Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG	Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG	Pilot	LAC/RoC	IGS	MMYG	
Check out	No talking down to others when they are talking	Do not interrupt when others are talking	No abuse	Azora to use child friendly language				Not too noisy in group activities	Don't smack each other		No chewing gum	
	No arguing	To respect others' opinions	Respect your elders	Children/YP to ask if they are not sure					Don't answer back to staff when you are told off		No throwing objects	
	No laughing at each others opinions	To respect your surroundings and others									No drugs	
		Respect your elders										
TOTALS												
RESPECT				INCLUSION				ORDER				
5	7	8	6	6	2	3	2	5	6	1		7

following four common categories of rights:

1. **For Freedom** - to join in, come and go, eat and drink, wear own cloths, to vote
2. **For Self-expression** - to explain views and ideas, comment on others views, to speak, to participate, to express emotions and feelings, and to act independently
3. **For Happiness** - enjoyment, and to have fun
4. **For Equality** - respect others fairly, to act reasonably, identity and religious beliefs and backgrounds

The various rights that have been set out demonstrate, I believe, a comprehensive and mature understanding. In terms of the responsibilities identified, the following three categories have emerged:

1. **To Non-violence** - no smacking, no swearing, no bullying
2. **To Co-operate** - to listen, support, contribute, respect, be involved and include others, to arrive on time, behave and complete the work given
3. **To the Environment** - to tidy up, clean and look after things

According to Woodhead (1997, in James and Prout, 1997, pp.63-84), several explanations for adults' attitudes towards the capabilities and responsibilities of children and young people, which are based on their 'biological and psychological' need for 'love and security, for new experiences, for praise and recognition and for responsibility' (p.69), provides some insight into how the participants compiled their lists. This is derived from the make-up of 'young humanity' in terms of their 'instincts, drives, motives and wants' (p.69). It is believed that the predisposition for these forces are influenced by the way

children and young people are given endorsements in the education system, which sees citizenship founded on 'a particular vision of how the government thinks society should function' (James & James, 2004, p.133) through the concept of 'participative democracy and co-operation'. In seeking to explore these particular factors, I was therefore aiming to test out what the children and young people themselves understood based on their learnt experiences and to see if they were centred on issues of equality and justice. I am of the view, that whilst the main expressions of rights are more self-orientated, though not all, the responsibilities identified are predominately altruistic in character. This suggests that the young citizens' understanding is well balanced between the individual and the collective factors that affect successful participation cohesion (Hartas, 2008).

In addition, the formulation of these particular distinct categories, illustrates that the various relatively simply stated responses to the rules, rights and responsibilities provide a clearly set of very defined principles, through which it is possible to create an effective means of developing better relations with children and young people and in recognising how best to promote effective responses as a consequence. This process is an important part of listening to children and young people, in that it seeks to respect their contributions and to appreciate the value that they bring to the dialogue.

## **7.6 Activity 2 – Examples of experiences of being listened to**

Activity 2 was carried out in the same way as the pilot study and provided the following process, observations and data.

### 7.6.1 Look After Children (LAC/RoC) Group Analysis

In the Look After Children's group, all 8 participants worked alone. They did, however, communicate with each other as they were writing up their examples. There was a lot of laughter and general 'chit-chat' between them as they completed this exercise. Help was at hand, if needed, from either myself or the RoC advocate member of staff who worked with me throughout the research. During this exercise, each participant was keen to identify examples which were positive. It was evident that they enjoyed the LAC/RoC group experience and provided good examples of times when they were listened to. When it came to providing examples in the community and leisure/social setting, however, they needed to be prompted to identify examples from their life experiences.

Table 7.4 (Appendix 6) sets out the various responses provided and Tables 7.5 provides an analysis of the 'instructive' and 'expressive' form of dialogue and or whether there has been either a 'no response' or a 'negative statements'.

#### Colour Code Key:

<b>Instructive Child-to- Child</b>	<b>Instructive Child- Adult- Child</b>	<b>Expressive Child-to- Child</b>	<b>Expressive Child- Adult- Child</b>	<b>Negative Child-to- Child</b>	<b>Negative Child- Adult- Child</b>	<b>No Re- sponse</b>
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Within the organisational setting, there are equal numbers of 'instructive' and 'expressive' examples of experiences provided overall. As one might expect, there was a significant focus placed on the social support provided by the LAC/RoC care staff, which may be related to the more immediate personal issues associated with the role of the advocates and the fact that the participants are in Looked After Services. There is little evidence of a sharing in the actual

Table 7.5 - Data from the Case Study Setting – Researcher Assumptions &amp; Interpretation

LAC/ROC CASE STUDY SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
7,	1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 18, 20, 21, 23 & 24	3, 6, 11, 12, 16 & 22	8, 10, 13, 15, 17 & 19			
SUB-TOTALS 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
1 or 4%	11 or 46%	6 or 25%	6 or 25%	0	0	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
12 or 50%		12 or 50%		0		0
COMMUNITY SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
2, 7, 8, 16 & 22	1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20 & 23	3, 17 & 21	9, 18 & 19		6 & 24	
SUB-TOTALS 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
5 or 21%	11 or 46%	3 or 12.5%	3 or 12.5%	0	2 or 8%	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
16 or 67%		6 or 25%		2 or 8%		0
LEISURE/SOCIAL SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
1, 4, 5 & 21	24	7,10,16, 20 & 23	2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17 & 18	22	12 & 19	
SUB-TOTALS 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
4 or 16.5%	1 or 4%	5 or 21%	11 or 46%	1 or 4%	2 or 8%	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/24 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
5 or 21%		16 or 67%		3 or 12%		0

choice of meals, group names and teams. Within the community setting, there is a significantly higher proportion of 'instructive' communication compared to the 'expressive' form - 67% verses 25%. The main expressive experiences are derived from communication directly with friends. In the leisure/social setting, the reverse is true – 21% verses 67%. Within these results, however, the majority of the child-adult-child 'expressive' communication, which represents 46% of the total, corresponds to communication within the home/carers environment — 11 out of 13 in total. There are therefore very few experiences of 'expressive' communication derived from actual involvement in the community setting.

### **7.6.2 Independent Girls' School (IGS) Analysis**

There were 15 girls who participated in this activity. One girl came into the group late and as a result worked alone to complete the task, otherwise the girls worked together. Tables 7.6 (Appendix 6) sets out the data recorded. Table 7.7 provides an analysis of the 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of dialogue or whether there has been either 'no response' or a 'negative statements'.

### **Commentary**

The data that has emerged from the IGS groups, indicates a very low total of 'instructive' communication (6.5%) within the school setting as compared to the 'expressive' communication level, which is 87%. In looking at the various responses associated with this, 8 out of 12 responses relate to lunch time activities or meal choices and suggests that in the free time areas of the curriculum the organisation was seeking to encourage opportunity for choice and



Table 7.7 - Data from the Case Study Setting – Researcher Assumptions &amp; Interpretation

INDEPENDENT GIRL'S School CASE STUDY SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
3		9	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 15	6		
SUB-TOTALS 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
0	1 or 6.5%	1 or 6.5%	12 or 80%	0	1 or 6.5%	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
1 or 6.5%		13 or 87%		1 or 6.5%		0
COMMUNITY SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
	2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13 & 14	8 & 15	6, 7, 9 & 12	1		
SUB-TOTALS 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
0	8 or 53%	2 or 13%	4 or 27%	1 or 6.5%	0	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
8 or 53%		6 or 40%		1 or 6.5%		0
LEISURE/SOCIAL SETTING						
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement		No Response
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	No Response
2, 3, 6, 12 & 15	1 & 11	5, 7, 8, 13 & 14	4, 9 & 10			
SUB-TOTALS 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
5 or 33%	2 or 13%	5 or 33%	3 or 20%	0	0	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/15 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)						
7 or 47%		8 or 53%		0		0

however, the division between the 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of communication were very closely matched. With the exception of the one statement (No.12), that noted that pupils had been listened to in obtaining cleaner swimming changing rooms, most of the community and the leisure/social setting experiences related to personal freedom issues associated within the family context.

### **7.6.3 Male Muslim Youth Group (MMYG) Analysis**

In the MMYG, there were a total of 21 youth group members who participated in this activity divided into four groups. Each group worked with me on an individual basis. It was evident that the members were able to speak positively and promptly about their experiences of being listened to by the youth group leaders. Tables 7.8 (Appendix 6) sets out the data recorded. Table 7.9 provides an analysis of the 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of dialogue or whether there has been either 'no response' or a 'negative statements'.

### **Commentary**

The data reveals that within the organisational setting, which is in fact a leisure/social setting, there was a significantly higher proportionate level of 'expressive' communication child-adult-child (58%). Within the experiences identified all of the responses related to service delivery matters. The 'instructive' forms of communication within the community setting (67%) is high, although within this category, some of the responses border on an 'expressive' form of communication. As with the other case study groups, many of the response relate to personal freedom issues associated within a family context setting.



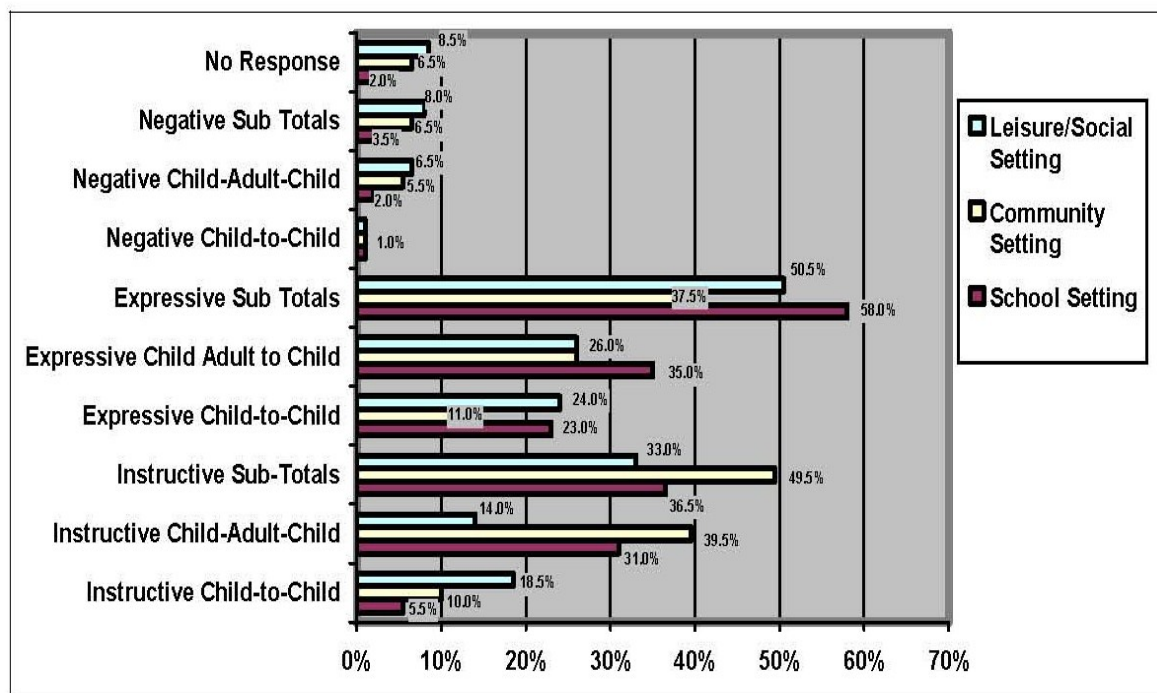
Table 7.9 - Data from the Case Study Setting – Researcher Assumptions &amp; Interpretation

MALE MUSLIM YOUTH GROUP CASE STUDY SETTING					
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement	
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child
7,8 & 10	6 & 12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 & 11			
SUB-TOTALS 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
0	3 or 25%	2 or 17%	7 or 58%	0	0
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
3 or 25%		9 or 75%		0	0
COMMUNITY SETTING					
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement	
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child
4, 5 & 9	3, 6, 7, 11 & 12		1, 2 & 8	10	0
SUB-TOTALS 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
3 or 25%	5 or 42%	0	3 or 25%	0	1 or 8%
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
8 or 67%		3 or 25%		1 or 8%	0
LEISURE/SOCIAL SETTING					
Instructive Statements		Expressive Statements		Negative Statement	
Child to Child	Child-Adult- Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child	Child to Child	Child-Adult-Child
2 & 4	9	1, 7 & 10	3, 8, 11 & 12	5 & 6	
SUB-TOTALS 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
2 or 17%	1 or 8%	3 or 25%	4 or 33%	0	2 or 17%
TOTALS AS A WHOLE 1/12 STATEMENTS (PERCENTAGES IN APPROXIMATION)					
3 or 25%		7 or 58%		2 or 17%	0

### 7.6.4 Overall Activity 2 Summary Analysis

Tables 7.10 to 7.12 sets out the overall summary totals for each of the case study settings and includes the data obtained from the pilot study. Graph 7.1 provides a pictorial illustration of the data percentages in the case study settings. From these tables and graphs, it is possible to identify the main variances, which have been the subject of comment above. In analysing this data there are two quite significant shifts within the overall comparative analysis, which are as follows:

- The high levels of 'expressive' communication identified in the organisation setting from the IGS (87%) and the MMYG (75%).
- The high levels of 'instructive' communication identified in the community setting from the LAC/Roc (67%) and MMYG (67%).



Graph 7.1 - Summary Graph of Case Study Settings' Data Percentage

Table 7.10 – Summary of Overall Data for Organisational Settings

DATE RELATING TO THE CASE STUDY SETTING EXPERIENCES												
Contextual Setting	Statement No's & Percentages Per Case Study	Instructive		Sub Totals	Expressive		Sub Totals	Negative		Sub Totals	No Response	
		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child			
Case Study School	Pilot Study No's (40)	4	13	17	12	7	19	1	1	2	2	
	%	10%	32.5%	42.5%	30%	17.5%	47.5%	2.5%	2.5%	5%	5%	
Case Study LAC/RoC	Case Study 1 LAC/RoC No's (24)	1	11	12	6	6	12	0	0	0	0	
	%	4%	46%	50%	25%	25%	50%	0	0	0	0	
Case Study IGS	Case Study 2 IGS No's (15)	0	1	1	1	12	13	0	1	1	0	
	%	0	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%	80%	87%	0	6.5%	6.5%	0	
Case Study MMYG	Case Study 3 MMYG No's (12)	0	3	3	2	7	9	0	0	0	0	
	%	0	25%	25%	17%	58%	75%	0	0	0	0	



### Table 7.11 – Summary of Overall Data for Community Settings

DATA RELATING TO THE COMMUNITY SETTING EXPERIENCES											
Contextual Setting	Statement No's & Percentages Per Case Study	Instructive		Sub Totals	Expressive		Sub Totals	Negative		Sub Totals	No Response
		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		
Case Study School	Pilot Study No's (40)	1	12	13	5	14	19	0	2	2	6
	%	2.5%	30%	32.5%	12.5%	35%	47.5%	0	5%	5%	15%
Case Study LAC/RoC	Case Study 1 LAC/RoC No's(24)	5	11	16	3	3	6	0	2	2	0
	%	21%	46%	67%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	0	8%	8%	0
Case Study IGS	Case Study 2 IGS No's (15)	0	8	8	2	4	6	1	0	1	0
	%	0	53%	53%	13.5%	27%	40.5%	6.5%	0	6.5%	0
Case Study MMYG	Case Study 3 MMYG No's (12)	3	5	8	0	3	3	0	1	1	0
	%	25%	42%	67%	0	25%	25%	0	8%	8%	0

Table 7.12 – Summary of Overall Data for Leisure and Social Settings

DATA RELATING TO THE LEISURE AND SOCIAL SETTING EXPERIENCES											
Contextual Setting	Statement No's & Percentages Per Case Study	Instructive		Sub Totals	Expressive		Sub Totals	Negative		Sub Totals	No Response
		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		Child to Child	Child-Adult-to-Child		
Case Study School	Pilot Study No's (40)	6	9	15	9	6	15	0	2	2	8
	%	15%	22.5%	37.5%	22.5%	15%	37.5%	0	5%	5%	20%
Leisure/ Social Example LAC/RoC	Case Study 1 LAC/RoC No's (24)	4	1	5	5	11	16	1	2	3	0
	%	16.5%	4%	21%	21%	46%	67%	4%	8%	12%	0
Leisure/ Social Example IGS	Case Study 2 IGS No's ((15)	5	2	7	5	3	8	0	0	0	0
	%	33%	13%	47%	33%	20%	53%	0	0	0	0
Leisure/ Social Example MMYG	Case Study 3 MMYG No's (12)	2	1	3	3	4	7	0	2	2	0
	%	17%	8%	25%	25%	33%	58%	0	17%	17%	0

Whilst these results may well be derived from my observation that both the IGS and the MMYG understood more clearly my research objectives in seeking to elicit examples which were 'expressive' in nature, it was nevertheless important to look critically and in further detail, at the actual statements of the participants to explore an understanding of what else might be driving these results. In undertaking this exercise, I found that many of the pilot study 'expressive' forms of communication (5 out of 7 statements) included key words such as 'opinion' and 'protest' that indicated the 'expressive' form of dialogue which had taken place. In the IGS's responses, the key words used were 'decide' and 'choose', and in the MMYG, the key word used was 'listening'. As a result of this analysis, I concluded that there was a process that underpinned the opportunity to develop 'expressive' forms of communication, which I believe, involve the following three distinctive stages:

1. The provision of opportunity; to facilitate and allow children and young people to have discussion and debate in order to enable them to express their voice, their opinions and preferences
2. A provision of a forum for 'action dialogue'; in which the children and young people's views are actively engaged at a level directly within the organisational structures
3. A positive experience of achieving an outcome; which is directly influenced by the dialogue that has taken place in item 2 above.

Within the IGS setting, it is evident that these stages or platforms have been deployed to enable the pupils' to exercise a choice during the lunch period,

including being able to influence the menu that they would like to have. Within the MMYG, the youth group leaders have effectively utilised a similar set of platforms to enable the members to impact on the operational structures as well as on the planned activities. Whilst, these areas are still subject to adult power and control, they do expand the experience of the children and young people in a positive way and help to engender a level of satisfaction.

The significance in the high levels of instructive communications in the community setting, has no recognisable underlying cause and suggests simply, I believe, that within these two groups the opportunity to experience 'expressive' forms of communication is more limited. In fact, the evidence suggests that the LAC/RoC group generally have fewer experiences of 'expressive' communications outside of those that relate directly to their personal circumstances, for which most likely, their individual carers or the organisation have a legal duty to perform. This is in stark contrast to the IGS, who have many examples based on their extra curricula activities, such as in having the opportunity each term to be involved in a range of lunch time activities and clubs.

Apart from in the MMYG, there are few opportunities provided by the other organisational settings to foster participation in the service delivery functions that exist.

### **7.7 Activity 3 – Ten words to describe what it feels like to be listened to and not listened to by adults**

Tables 7.13 and 7.14 set out the responses recorded for both questions by the

case study groups, who were in some instances broken up into subgroups as indicated. These results, which are very similar in type and form to the pilot study Appendix 4, have been analysed using the same following three categories:

1. **To relate gratification at being included** – this confirms that children and young people feel happy and thankful when adults actively relate, listen and include them
2. **To raise the spirit in a responsive way** – this confirms that children and young people feel that their spirit is up-lifted as a direct response when adults listen to and include them
3. **To value and respect participation** – this confirms that children and young people feel a sense of value when they are respected, listened to and included by adults

In total there were nine sub-groups that provided answers, all of which reveal a significant degree of similarity and reinforces the pilot study conclusions. They also reveal that matters of sociological or economic conditions do not impact on the experiences and basic feelings.

In the same way, the following question two categories defined in the pilot study have been utilised to analyse the data obtained:

1. **To express discontentment** – this confirms that children and young people feel melancholy when adults do not listen and exclude them



Table 7.13 – Activity 3: Case Study Responses to Question 1

1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?									
Case Study 1 Looked After Children			Case Study 2 Independent Girls School			Case Study 3 Male Muslim Youth Group			
1 Group			Group 1			Group 1		Group 2	
1. Good			1. Happy			1. Feel Happy		1. Happy	1. Feel comfortable
2. Appreciated			2. Included			2. Relieved		2. Respected	2. Welcomed
3. Respected			3. Glad			3. Heard		3. Valued	3. Feel positive
4. Happy			4. Proud			4. Treated Fairly		4. Honoured	4. Exuberant
5. Feel much better			5. Important			5. Exuberant		5. Important	5. Euphoria
6. Feel safe			6. Unstressed			6. Excited		6. Cheerful	6. Heard
7. Wanted			7. Good			7. Satisfied		7. Useful	7. Happy
8. Liked			8. Fine			8. Important		8. Exuberant	8. Excited
9. Valued our opinion			9. Grateful			9. Had attention		9. Joyful	9. Joyful
10. Great and relieved			10. Respected			10. Joyful		10. Exhilarated	10. Satisfied

Table 7.14 – Activity 3: Case Study Responses to Question 2

2. When we are not listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?									
Case Study 1 Looked After Children			Case Study 2 Independent Girls School			Case Study 3 Male Muslim Youth Group			
1 Group			Group 1			Group 1		Group 2	
1. Angry			1. Unimportant			1. Sad		1. Upset	1. We get down
2. Frustrated			2. Sad			2. Disappointed		2. Useless	2. No manners
3. Unwanted			3. Ignored			3. Upset		3. Miserable	3. Sad
4. Upset			4. Un-included			4. Unfortunate		4. Worthless	4. Heartbroken
5. Let down			5. Stressed			5. Treated Unfairly		5. Disrespected	5. Let down
6. Not respected			6. Angry			6. Pressurised		6. Unhappy	6. Tearful
7. Not listened to			7. Upset			7. Unhappy		7. Degraded	7. Empty
8. Unappreciated			8. Unhappy			8. Unsatisfied		8. Discriminated	8. Unwanted
9. Stressed Out			9. Aggressive			9. Shattered		9. Prejudged	9. Stressed
10. Undervalued			10. Cry-full			10. Left in tears		10. Underestimated	10. Mentally Disturbed

2. **To be absent from participation** – this confirms that children and young people feel cut off and isolated when adults do not listen and exclude them.
3. **To wilfully disregard** – this confirms that children and young people feel discounted and ignored when adults do not listen and exclude them
4. **To provoke discord** – this confirms that children and young people feel annoyed and irritated when adults do not listen and exclude them
5. **To reject and devalue** – this confirms that children and young people feel useless and discounted when adults do not listen and exclude them
6. **To demean status** – this confirms that children and young people feel humiliated in status when adults do not listen and exclude them

Tables 7.15 and 7.16 provided the category responses from the case study groups. These also reveal significant commonality, and the fact that they appear to be unrelated to sociological or economic factors.

## **7.8 Activity 4 - Circle Time Discussion**

As previously confirmed, this activity was integrated throughout the IGWP and did not therefore form a separate activity.

Table 7.15 - Categorisation of Data for Question 1

1. When we are listened to and included it makes us feel like?						
Category Number and Characteristic Traits	Case Study 1 Looked After Children	Case Study 2 Independent Girls School		Case Study 3 Male Muslim Youth Group		
	Group 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1 To relate gratification at being included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Feel much better</li> <li>• Great &amp; relieved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Included</li> <li>• Glad</li> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Fine</li> <li>• Grateful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Included</li> <li>• Normal small choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel happy</li> <li>• Relieved</li> <li>• Satisfied</li> <li>• Joyful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Cheerful</li> <li>• Joyful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel comfortable</li> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Joyful</li> <li>• Satisfied</li> </ul>
2 To raise the spirit in a responsive way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanted</li> <li>• Feel Safe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unstressed</li> <li>• Proud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awesome</li> <li>• Proud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exuberant</li> <li>• Excited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honoured</li> <li>• Exuberant</li> <li>• Exhilarated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcomed</li> <li>• Exuberant</li> <li>• Euphoria</li> <li>• Excited</li> </ul>
3 To value and respect participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciated</li> <li>• Respected</li> <li>• Liked</li> <li>• Valued our opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respected</li> <li>• Important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible</li> <li>• Respected</li> <li>• Listened too</li> <li>• Valued</li> <li>• Important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heard</li> <li>• Treated fairly</li> <li>• Important</li> <li>• Had attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respected</li> <li>• Valued</li> <li>• Important</li> <li>• Useful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel positive</li> <li>• Heard</li> </ul>
4 (Unsure of meaning)						

Table 7.16 - Categorisation of Data for Question 2

2. When we are not listened to and excluded it makes us feel like?						
Category Number and Characteristic Traits	Case Study 1 Looked After Children	Case Study 2 Independent Girls School		Case Study 3 Male Muslim Youth Group		
	Group 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1 To express discontentment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-set</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sad</li> <li>Up-set</li> <li>Unhappy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-set</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sad</li> <li>Up-set</li> <li>Unhappy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-set</li> <li>Miserable</li> <li>Unhappy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We get down</li> <li>Sad</li> <li>Heartbroken</li> </ul>
2 To be absent from participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not respected</li> <li>Not listened too</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Un-included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Left out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unfortunate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underestimated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No manners</li> </ul>
3 To wilfully disregard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unappreciated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invisible</li> <li>Ignored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treated unfairly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disrespected</li> <li>Pre-judged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empty</li> </ul>
4 To provoke discord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Angry</li> <li>Frustrated</li> <li>Stressed out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Angry</li> <li>Aggressive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annoyed</li> <li>Frustrated</li> <li>Angry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressurised</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stressed</li> </ul>
5 To reject and devalue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let down</li> <li>Undervalued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimportant</li> <li>Stressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unimportant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disappointed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worthless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let down</li> <li>Unwanted</li> </ul>
6 To demean status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unwanted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cry-full</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feel small</li> <li>Useless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsatisfied</li> <li>Shattered</li> <li>Left in tears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Useless</li> <li>Discriminated</li> <li>Degraded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tearful</li> <li>Mentally disturbed</li> </ul>

## **7.9 Activity 5 - 32 Picture Images**

The purpose of this activity was to explore how the children and young people saw themselves in relation to the various social and environmental situations illustrated in the 32 images. Originally, in the pilot study, this exercise had been orientated towards eliciting responses which were connected to the three contexts of organisation (school), community and leisure/social. In the case study settings, however, there was only a requirement to provide one statement. Table 7.17 illustrates the first four responses (Appendix 6 records all 32 image data responses obtained in the exercise) provided by each of the case study groups recorded during the plenary circle time discussion.



**Table 7.17 - Images and individual Case Study Responses**

Images	Individual Case Study Responses		
1	Case Study 1 LAC/RoC	Case Study 2 IGS	Case Study 3 MMYG
	<p>Community service. Police seen as helpful. Graffiti, disrespect bad and stupid. Police seen as helpful.</p>	<p>People blame children. People blame children for it. Children generally blamed for graffiti. A police officer arresting children for the graffiti. Bad impression of young people because of the graffiti.</p>	<p>Kids and teens vandalism. Stereotypical judgements. Young people are disregarded.</p>
	<p>Learning is important. Enjoying herself – Maybe she has achieved something. Happy and pleased with the work she has done. Enjoying herself, maybe she has achieved something.</p>	<p>Children being responsible. She is happy and doing lots of homework. The girl is working hard at school. She has worked hard.</p>	<p>After vandalism, they get peckish. Education. Young people do their home work.</p>
	<p>Having fun is important. Having fun, playing working together. Happy looks like they have achieved something enjoyable for themselves. Having fun playing working together as a team.</p>	<p>Children being active Having fun and participating. Children have a chance to participate. Team work. People can join in to have fun.</p>	<p>They robbed a ball off kids. Youth should play sport and stay off the streets. Playing football.</p>
	<p>Don't drop litter. Litter, environment disrespect in the area and rats. Dirty, disrespect of property its trampy. Trampy, litter environmental disrespect.</p>	<p>Kids not responsible. Adults always blame us. Littering is bad for the community.</p>	<p>They play in garbage. Don't care about the area. Fly tipping.</p>

In the following sections I have written my interpretation of the data from each of the settings:

### **7.9.1 Looked After Children - LAC/RoC**

In the LAC/RoC case study group, the children and young people were divided into three groups of three children working together. The majority of the discussion in each of the groups tended to focus on what key issues came to mind when they viewed the images as well as which were the important ones to record on the flip chart paper to present back in the plenary. From my observations of this activity, I noted the following points:

- The fact that each group was able to write down a comprehensive response to each of the images and that these responses were similar in nature
- The children and young people were able to express a definitive view on what the images meant for them. This indicates a familiarity and awareness of the different contextual situations and their impact on environmental and on social factors around them
- That bullying and supporting others had key responses in images 6, 8, 15, 16, 17 and 27
- That they had an understanding about environmental and world issues in images 1, 4, 12, 13a/b, 22, 23, 25, 28 and 29
- That they had perceptiveness about social order and what constitutes anti-social behaviour in images 1, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 26, 29 and 31
- That they had an insight into what were considered healthy, fun and helpful

or worthwhile activities in images 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28 30 and 32

- That they had a perception of equality issues and celebrating cultural identity in images 6, 18, 23, 24, 25 and 30

It was evident that the children and young people from this case study setting wrote more than those from the other two case study settings. The data from the LAC/RoC provides an insight into how these particular young citizens view the world by drawing on their experiences. This also offers an insight into their values and ethics (Foley, Roche and Tucker, 2001). It is clear from examining the feedback responses, that these young citizens have a good understanding of current affairs and issues of fairness, in terms of equality and justice. Accordingly, this indicates, in my view, that they have an effective sense and understanding of what constitutes good practice in society and the wider community. The concept of happiness and having fun featured in some of the responses, which according to Hartas (2008), indicates a measure of an individual's health and wellbeing and that it offers 'evidence that children's happiness sets the stage for learning, creativity and good inter-personal relationships' (p.69).

### **7.9.2 Independent Girls' School – IGS**

The Independent Girls School group divided into five smaller groups of three pupils who worked together diligently and presented their comments on a feedback sheet. From my observations, I noted the following points:



- That each group was able to write down a response to each of the images and that these responses were similar in nature
- That the pupils had a good sense of responsibility and an understanding of issues associated with judgements such as blame as indicated in images 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13a/b, 14, 15, 17, 19, 26, 27, 29 and 31
- That they had perceptive views about how children and young people might be seen by adults as indicated in images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 31
- That the pupils were clear about what constitutes having fun and what is enjoyable, based on images 3, 7, 9, 10, 20, 30 and 32
- That they have an understanding of environmental and community issues as expressed in images 1, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13a/b, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29 and 32
- That they were aware of social order matters, such as bullying and anti-social behaviour as indicated in images 1, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 25, 26, 27, 29 and 31
- That the pupils were able to highlight what represents a sense of achievement and hard work as indicated in images 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 23.

In my observation, the main dialogue focused on the freedom to be involved in local activities, such as in helping to keep the environment clean and pollution free. The IGS provided similar feedback to the LAC/RoC group in that they also had a good sense for current social issues and an understanding of the responsibilities that should be extended to both civic duties and to one another. I

was impressed with how well the pupils presented the information and the way they entered into a discussion about the issues depicted in the images during the circle time plenary. In this group of young citizens, it was clear that the pupils had a good level of political awareness of current affairs, which was not so evident in any of the other two case study settings. The pupils were able to converse in an articulate and confident way throughout the group work activity and indicated that they had found the activity informative and challenging during the session evaluation feedback. As a result, I am of the view that the experiences they shared across the various settings had meant that they had exposure to many political, social and environmental matters. The current thinking, according to Hartas (2008), suggests that childhood assumes that young citizens occupy a separate terrain to that of adults when it comes to their exposure to the role society plays in socialisation. Whilst there is probably truth in the notion of a distinction between an adult's and the young citizen's worlds, the observations and feedback arising from this exercise reveals that the children and young people are very aware of and are clearly influenced by society. Furthermore, it is apparent that they have a broader understanding of their communities and the world around them than perhaps a lot of adults would give them credit for.

### **7.9.3 Male Muslim Youth Group - MMYG**

There were a lot of young citizens at the youth group when I conducted this particular session of the IGWP. Consequently, I broke the members into 3 groups of 7 young citizens and worked directly with each group in turn. It was also necessary to curtail the activity somewhat, by reducing the number of images to 10, which was agreed with the youth group leader and the youth group

members. Even with this variation, it was still hard work to co-ordinate the group work activity and to encourage each group to write down their comments on the flip-chart paper provided.

Following the group work activity, the whole youth group had a separate collaborative discussion, in which I selected a number of images from the other 22 pictures to help centre the discussion. The majority of the debate focused on the way the police service is able to support them as young people and in generally helping to encourage 'kids' involvement in activities so as it keep them off the streets and reduce knife crime and drug addiction. The youth group also talked about helping people less able or worse off than themselves, such as the disabled. In addition, environmental issues were also a key area for debate, particularly fly tipping. There was a clear sense that their understanding extended beyond the immediate image situation to other related social matters, such as with images 19 and 26, which they considered to have an anti-social behavioural attribute.

In my observations, I noted that the members seemed to be more adept at entering into the wider discussions than in undertaking the smaller group work activity exercises. I got the sense that some of the members demonstrated contradictory views between what they shared in the smaller and the larger groups during the discussions. This contradiction was related to their social responsibility towards the law and the need to act diligently. In connection with this, there was an issue about how they are viewed as male Asian young people in the wider society. They affirmed that in their experiences they were treated

differently to others sectors of the population, although at that point in time however, they were unwilling to discuss what these issues were. After the session had completed, however, I was able to explore this matter with the youth group leaders and they explained that they were centred on the way they, as male Muslims, are treated and portrayed in wider society.

During the youth group member feedback, the members expressed the view that the activity was too much like a school based one, particular with regard to the evaluation plenary at the end of the session, which was why they did not want to complete a commentary on all 32 images.

#### **7.9.4 Concluding Analysis**

The overall impression obtained from observing each of the case study organisations during this activity has led me to judge that the children and young people were all very aware of their communities and the associated issues relating to wider social, political and economic matters. They were able to perceive the intended interpretive meaning behind each image as presented to them and were capable of being able to extend the meaning through their experiences from within their daily lives. It was also evident that, alongside their knowledge base, they could speak with a high degree of confidence and sensibility and with clear awareness of the related social significance and meaning that would be prevalent, in my view, in the wider adult dominated society.

#### **7.10 Activity 6 - Consent**

This activity, which in the pilot study centred on consent, was in the case study fieldwork transferred and incorporated into the introductory session.

### **7.11 Activity 7 – Role Plays**

In approaching activity 7, I made a modification, following the experience gained in the pilot study, to allocate an additional 10 minutes to allow a total of 30 minutes to prepare the activity. In addition, I extended more flexibility to allow for the young citizens to choose for themselves what they wanted to present, which could be set in any of the three contextual settings – the case study organisational setting, the community and or within their leisure/social setting.

In each of the case study settings the children and young people in undertaking the role play exercise engaged with the activity and entered into the spirit of the role play acting when performed in front of their peers. The reason for adopting this slight variation in approach was because of the need to manage the group sizes as well as the available space in each of the case study settings.

At the outset, all of the participants were given an information sheet, which outlined the parameters of the role play activity; its nature, planning process, time-scales and presentational requirements. In all case study settings I conducted a circle time discussion after completing the role plays to examine the key issues that emerged from the role plays.

In the LAC/RoC and IGS groups, there were two role plays completed by the young citizens. In the MMYG there were three short improvisational role plays

undertaken. The LAC/RoC group had 30 minutes to prepare for their role plays and had 10 minutes delivery time. In the IGS, they had 15 minutes to prepare and had 8 minutes to deliver due to the constraints of time. The whole 45 minute session in the MMYG was taken up with an initial circle time discussion and three short improvisational role plays. In all three case study setting there was a debrief group discussion following the role play exercise about the key issues the children and young people had portrayed. The groups worked with an adult as they prepared for the role play delivery.

Tables 7.18, 7.19 and 7.20 (Appendix 6) provide a summary of the role plays undertaken in each of the settings and details the planning process, a brief description of the role play scenarios and the key themes, which I considered to be important.

#### **7.11.1 LAC/RoC Group Observations**

All of the participants who took part could not be perceived, I believe, as being in anyway 'docile' (Lee, 2003, 2005 p. 87) as they were very confident in presenting a child's 'voice', despite some ambiguities in the role play scenarios, most particularly with role play 1 in the LAC/RoC group. This in my view, showed that the participants were not ignorant of the conventions of real life experiences, in which they were able to demonstrate an understanding of a citizen in 'social life' (Parsons, 1956 in Lee, 2003, 2005. p. 89). From my observations, I could see that participation tends to build upon participatory processes involving knowledge, familiarisation, information and insights, which young citizens experience 'about the area where they live and issues that affect their

lives' (Driskell, 2002, p.33). It acknowledges and values the input and perceptions of young people, which is according to Driskell (2002) 'often very different from those of adults' (p.33).

That said, there was a contrast between each of the role plays undertaken by the groups. In the first role play it was difficult to assess whether the way each of the characters played their roles was, in fact, evidence of a real life lived experience, whereas in the role play 2 scenario, it was much more realistic and plausible. Consequently, role play 1 seemed to have lost its purpose and was therefore unrealistic — a belief that was confirmed during the group work discussion following the completion of the activity as most of the LAC/RoC participants themselves felt it was unlikely to have happened as portrayed in the scenario. All of the group members indicated that they felt that the mother character would have gone after her son had he actually run off because “she would have been afraid he might have been run over by a car” (group member).

Notwithstanding, I consider that both role plays demonstrated an understanding of the interface in the form of dialogue and communication between adults and children (mother and her children or community centre worker and the boy character) and between adults and adults (mother and the community centre worker) and between child to child (friends). Both groups kept within the parameters of the task, although role play 1 presented within a shorter five minute time scale. This showed that the participants had not only understood the task but also had the responsibility to execute it.

### **7.11.2 IGS Group Observations**

In scenario 1 - the Blackpool trip to the seaside, the pupils were able to improvise the adult characters realistically. One of the adult roles that was depicted portrayed a rather strict character with a very authoritarian nature with the scenario revolving around a very 'instructive' form of dialogue. The second adult role player portrayed a more willing and co-operative individual whose attitude was noted by the young citizen's character as being more helpful.

In the second role play - a bus journey, there was again a central dialogue between an adult bus driver, an adult passenger and a young citizen. Again the adults were portrayed negatively with much of the interaction dialogue being of an 'instructive' nature.

### **7.11.3 MMYG Group Observations**

In this group, all three scenarios were based on improvisation within a circle time discussion context. In the first scenario - two brothers were communicating. The older brother (aged 17) spoken in a rather rough and authoritarian manner to the younger brother. In the second scenario - A shop-keeper demonstrated distrust as the adult character towards the young people and viewed them as a nuisance and a 'public order problem' (Lee, 2003, p.63). The young people were aware of the fact that they can be perceived as a separate group within society. In the role play scenario they expressed their feelings of not being equal to the adult customer character. This can create, in my view, a barrier to social cohesion. In the third scenario - a family setting was acted out, which involved a conflicts



between adult parents and their sibling. The role play clearly showed how power dynamics are manifested to assert authority at the times when conflict breaks out.

#### **7.11.4 Final Commentary**

In all of the settings and role plays, the children and young people were able to portray the interactions in a realistic and effective way demonstrating both adult and young citizens' everyday characteristics and events. In doing this, they provided solid evidence that in their lived experiences they had encountered oppressive, overly authoritarian and negative attitude directed towards children and young people. Interestingly, even the 17 year old character, showed the early stages of oppressive behaviour.

In undertaking this activity, all of the young people showed imagination, creativity, and sound reflective objectivity. They were confident, receptive and capable of assuming the responsibility for working within the groups in a self-regulating way to deliver the role play in an effective manner.

#### **7.12 Activity 8 – Create your own Activity – Plan, Deliver and Evaluate**

In each of the case study settings, the groups were given the opportunity to plan, deliver and evaluate an activity for which they would take full responsibility for undertaking. A full narrative description of each group's activity is detailed in Appendix 6.

As in the pilot study, I outlined in detail what the activity needed to achieve prior to the young citizens taking responsibly for the sessions. To help in this, I began

each session with a circle time discussion to identify the key elements of the activity and to provide a forum for them to seek points of clarification on matters which they were unsure about. The circle time discussion helped to reinforce the key aims within a more expressive form of interaction. I believe, this provided an important improvement to the process undertaken in the pilot study, since all of the case study participants were better prepared to understand the task so as to accomplish it more efficiently and effectively. I also believed, that in spending more time with the participants to explain and clarifying the aims and learning outcomes of the session, I was able to emphasise the need for them to take ownership, leadership and responsibility for the necessary judgements that would enable them to reflect and evaluate the session at the end, in an effective way.

The importance of emphasising the session's vision was critical, in that I was particularly keen to evaluate more fully the degree in which young citizens are able to reach their full potential in these areas. I also wanted to reinforce their rights to have their views listened to and acted upon in delivering the activity. The only exception to this empowerment was in relation to any potential issues relating to health and safety, end of time constraints, inappropriate behaviour or where there was a significant non-compliance with the session remit. I was nevertheless clear about these constraints at the outset, as I set out the following basic parameters for the activity:

- That all the groups would be allocated 30 minutes to plan their activity, which would then be presented to the whole participant group
- That the activity must include everyone in the group and that everyone

should keep within the ground rules, and with particular regard to health and safety issues if the activity included a physical component to it

- That everyone should understand their group's activity so that it could be clearly delivered
- That the activity delivery should be no longer than 10 minutes in duration
- That there should be an introduction to the activity which explains what is involved and what is expected of the participants
- That at the end of the activity the group is to evaluate its own performance as well as evaluating the other group's performances
- That the activity should be enjoyable and not be too complicated
- That each group could use props if available within the case study setting

#### **7.12.1 The Generic Planning Process within the Case Study Settings**

In my reflective commentary on the planning process for each of the case study setting as a whole (see Appendix 6) I gained a much greater insight into young citizen's capabilities during this final activity. In addition, it also challenged my own assumptions about what young citizens do to help their peers when they work closely with one another. For example, each group of young citizens indicated that they were saddened that the research had come to an end. The children and young people in the LAC/RoC group were particularly upset at the idea of not meeting up with one another again following the final session. Furthermore, I was able to see that the allocated circle time discussion was a very significant element in the whole process, as it provided a foundation for all

the participants to have a greater understanding of what was expected from the session, in a manner which was respectful and inclusive.

In undertaking the activity, each group worked separately during the planning stage within the 30 minute time frame to organise their activity. Each of the groups had an adult to assist them during the preparation stage and as with the pilot study, there was a 'buzz' of activity as the participants developed their own particular responses. Unlike the pilot study, however, I did not work with any one group specifically, as I felt it was important to provide any additional guidance that might be needed to all the groups, should they require it. This freed my role and enabled me to better observe the groups in operation as I moved from group to group. I felt, this was an important improvement from the pilot study process, as it allowed me an opportunity to evaluate how effective the involvement of all the group members was being achieved and to see if individual group members were dominating, to the exclusion of others. The following list provides confirmation about how many groups were involved in each setting and the total number of young citizens taking part:

- In the LAC/RoC group there were two groups of participants with four young people in them (8 in total)
- In the IGS there were two groups of participants both with six members in each of them (12 in total)
- In the MMYG there were three groups, two with five members and one with six members (16 in total).

Once each of the groups had reached the 30 minute stage, I called them together, in order to undertake a short discussion with them about the delivery process so that I could avoid any health and safety difficulties, which had occurred in the pilot study. This break also allowed the opportunity for me to invite a volunteer group to start the delivery process. Following the delivery activities, all of the participants completed an evaluation and group reflective proforma, which was identical to the pilot study. The proforma requested the participants to say how well they had undertaken the activity as a collective group and to judge how well they felt their peer groups had performed.

#### **7.12.2 Delivery of the Activities in the Case Study Settings**

A detailed commentary for each of the activity delivery sessions has been documented in Appendix 6, together with tabulation tables that identify the feedback and evaluation exercises undertaken.

#### **7.12.3 Evaluation and Analysis**

The need to accomplish and foster good relationships between the participants is according to Batsleer (2008) an essential feature of informal learning. An important factor in facilitating young people to become skilled at negotiating and exploring the meaning of competence is the need to ensure that informed consent is established, which supports 'respectful relationships' (p.91). This was an important element in the final exercise of the IGWP, since I wanted to try and dispel the 'predisposition' (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009 p.14) towards adult dominated practice, which some of the young citizens had expressed during

IGWP activities, when relating their experiences of real life incidents. It was therefore an essential and integral part of the research to ensure the participants understood that their participation was based on what they themselves brought to the engagement process and that hearing their voice was essential to this. In this way, it was possible to create a foundation of a 'youth-adult partnership' (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009 p.18), which resisted reinforcing an adultism approach and perspective.

Through this activity, I sought to analyse and assess the degree to which the children and young people had been able to demonstrate 10 particular key skills, which I formulated as part of the pilot study to help analyse the data and observations and to provide evidence of the abilities that are central to effective participation. As a result of the case studies, I have been able to advance the formulation in order to qualify these key competency skill sets with the following definitions:

1. **Self-assurance and confidence** – by undertaking the task, communicating and explaining the activity to the rest of the participant group
2. **Perception, sensitivity and discernment** – by showing perceptive insight for reading the situation and being sensitive to the needs of the participants, and having discernment of judgment about how well the group was performing
3. **Creativity** – by showing an ability to be resourceful and imaginative in the type of activity the group delivered.

4. **Personal and collective authority and responsibility** – that the whole group would both individually and collectively be responsible for ensuring that the activity was achievable, delivered within the time allocation and that it was explained and executed effectively
5. **Intellectual curiosity and entrepreneurialism** – that the group would show intelligence and inquisitiveness about how well they, as participants, engaged and got involved in the activity
6. **Reliable, logical thought and democratic judgement** – that the group would be consistent in their approach and show a self-governing nature in their judgments
7. **Sound reflective objectivity** – by showing that the group is able to undertake realistic impartial reflection
8. **Receptiveness** – by being approachable and interested in the activity so as to take leadership in executing it effectively
9. **A level of sophistication and relative maturity** – by being able to show cleverness, appropriate to their age and understanding, in the way the group performed the activity throughout the planning, delivery and evaluation stages
10. **Self-regulating** - by being proactive and responsive to achieving the requirements of the task and keeping within the activity parameters.

Table 7.30 illustrates my judgements on how each of the groups were able to demonstrate these competency skills in undertaking Activity 8. In noting these

judgments, in my view, only 2 out of the 7 groups met all of the 10 skill sets (Lac/RoC - Group 1 and IGS - Group 2). One further group (IGS - Group 1) met 8 out of the 10 skills. Three of the groups had less than three skills recorded, which was reflected in both their own and their peer group feedback.

Table 7.30 - Competency Aptitude Skills

No	Competency Skills	LAC/RoC		IGS		MMYG		
		G1 Design a Poster	G2 A Role Play	G1 Telling a Short Story	G2 Writing a Letter	G1 Catch, Catch Ball	G2 Archery Board Game	G3 Guess Who Game
1	Self-assurance and confidence	√		√	√	√		
2	Perception, sensitivity and discernment	√			√		√	
3	Creativity	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
4	Personal and collective authority and responsibility	√		√	√	√		
5	Intellectual curiosity and entrepreneurialism	√			√			
6	Reliable logical thought and democratic judgement	√		√	√			
7	Sound reflective objectivity	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
8	Receptiveness	√		√	√			
9	A level of sophistication and relative maturity	√		√	√			
10	Self-regulation	√		√	√	√		

From this analysis, it is clear that young citizens have the capacity and the necessary competency to successfully undertake participatory responsibilities. The fact, that not all of the competencies were demonstrated all of the time is no different, in my view, to the disparity that would exist in any cross section of an adult citizen's group. Of particular interest, is the fact that all of the groups demonstrated creativity and sound reflective objectivity. I was able to see that these two skill sets were evident in all three elements of the activity - planning,



delivery and evaluation. Interestingly, within the adultism discourse, there exists a firm view that children and young people do not have sufficient skills to be able to demonstrate sound reflective objectivity, which my fieldwork analysis rejects. This exercise, as well as demonstrating a repertoire of competency skills, supports my ontological perspective that children and young people have a unique and distinct capacity to participate and engage in decisions which affect them. This evaluation was possible, I believe, because of the emphasis placed on providing a proper platform through which the children and young people were empowered to take on the activity's leadership and execution.

### **7.13 Staff Survey Questionnaires**

The design of the questionnaire was developed from the pilot study to comprise the following four parts:

- Background details – Staff roles, gender, age and ethnicity
- Five introductory questions – which were rating questions
- Four intermediate questions – with 'yes/no answers and an 'If yes/no' short explanation request
- Two concluding questions – seeking written response to express opinions and suggestions

In a similar way to the pilot study the questionnaire format and size was aimed at being completed within a 15 minutes timescale and was issued to all members of the organisations staff. In total, 15 replies were returned - 2 from the LAC/RoC, 7 from the IGS and 6 from the MMYG. Whilst, I was disappointed in the number of

returns, this was somewhat compensated for with the number of semi-structured interviews obtained.

### **7.13.1 Questionnaire Data and Assessment**

The questionnaire data collection and analysis is tabulated in Tables 7.31 and 7.32 in Appendix 6. In addition, to the data tabulation there is also a qualitative assessment for each of the questions posed.

### **7.13.2 Questionnaire Analysis and Commentary**

From the analysis it is clear that there are real distinctions that have emerged between the three case study organisations. To some extent, this can be associated with the differences that exist in the organisations' purposes. For example, the LAC/RoC organisation is very focused on ensuring that each individual child is empowered to exercise their right to participate in the decisions that affect them personally and directly. Similarly, the MMYG is constituted to encourage participation under a voluntary operational umbrella. Whilst the IGS, has as its primary purpose the responsibility to impart knowledge and facilitate learning. As a consequence, it is evident that there has been a different interpretation given to the questions, most particularly from the LAC/RoC group. Nevertheless, each of these varying distinctions has enabled me, as the researcher, to explore a wider field of consideration, than simply that which is found within the organisations' environment.

There was, however, a commonality in the lack of examples that could demonstrate the ways in which the participation agenda had affected each of the

organisations' operational structures, especially in so far as their services are delivered. Although there were few examples, it was recognised in one instance, that pupil involvement in curriculum areas could generate new areas of study. In addition, there was in the LAC/RoC group a process established for influencing the senior management group in their desire to listen to the children and young people's voice. Generally, however, there were few formal mechanisms established which could influence organisational matters, despite the fact that there was an overwhelming belief in the capabilities of children and young people to participate with understanding. It was possible to see a disparity between, on the one hand, acknowledging the value of participation as a personal development goal and the provision of the necessary structures which could create meaningful experiences of participation. Overall, it was possible to discern that in regard to the latter point, a degree of adult oppression was prevalent, which failed to see the unique contribution that could be made by children and young people. From a positive stand point, there was a clear understanding of the importance of listening to children and young people and its importance as a criteria for respecting them.

#### **7.14 Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with each of the participating organisations. Table 7.33, 7.34 and 7.35 (Appendix 6) set out a summary of the data analyses. Due to the nature of the interview process, which involved developing a dialogue with the interviewees, specific and particular follow-up questions were included to help facilitate a greater understanding of the individual comments being expressed. The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview

format enabled me to adjust the question in response to the particular direction that emerged. These responses have helped identify key points arising from each organisation and have aided my understanding of the organisations' perception of how young citizens participate in the engagement process, and how their particular organisations seek to actively respond to this agenda.

The number of adults/staff members interviewed varied between each case study organisation and generated the following interview numbers:

- LAC/RoC - 5 members of staff (2 Managers and 3 Participation Officers)
- IGS - 2 members of staff and 1 Head Girl aged 18 years
- MMYG - 2 members of the youth leadership team

Arising from the aims of the study, the following areas of investigation were covered:

1. Understanding the organisation's participation agenda rationale
2. Understanding the various participation forms and structures
3. Identifying the participation gains and obstacles
4. Evaluating the participation applications against Hart's model
5. Identifying improvement/advancement and recommendations

## **1. Understanding the Rationale**

Each interview opened with a question that sought to draw out the organisations general understanding of the rationale that underpinned their particular participation agenda approach. Within the IGS the responses were in contrast to

each other. On the one hand there was a lack of appreciation – *“Rationale? I don’t know what the rationale is”* (IGS, KR Head of PHSE, February 2010), which was qualified with a further, rather indifferent, statement saying, *“I think we perceive it to be good practice”* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010). Whereas the other staff member spoke of the children as being *“central to the school, and the heart of the school”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010). For this reason she felt it was *“very important that they’re part of the decision making and that they’re given some sort of responsibility in that area”*.

In the LAC/RoC service the focus was mainly on the individual advocacy process. They emphasised the importance of giving children *“a voice and to ensure that they feel that they’ve been heard, even if it does not make any difference to the outcome”* (RoC, SMaC, Participation Officer, October 2009). To some extent, it was recognised that the main objective was to be able to demonstrate that they *“did consult with the young people”* (RoC, DG, Participation Officer, October 2009) in order to reflect legislative requirements, although it was also recognised that there was a *“moral”* (RoC, GJ, Service Manager, October 2009) imperative as well.

Participation was therefore centred on offering children and young people a *“unique participation opportunities and a rights based approach which, you know, will offer them opportunities to develop their self-esteem, their confidence, give them something back, and also to make a difference, because that’s what children’s rights and engagement service is about”* (RoC, NK, Operations

Manager, October 2009). To this end, there was recognition *“that children aren’t stupid ....., and that they can have a valued contribution”* (RoC, RT, Participation Officer, October 2009).

Within the MMYG the rationale was based on inclusion – *“it’s important for young people to be included”* (MMYG, MS, Youth Group Leader, February 2010). This was felt to be a key objective because it was a means of maintaining interest and involvement. In addition, they recognised that there was a potential in young people to communicate within their own target audience, which needed to be empowered – *“they can have a great input and get to their target audience, so for us guys, getting behind them, empowering them, getting the right support, facilities, get to the right way we want to go”* (MMYG, FS, Volunteer Youth Worker, February 2010).

Even though, it is evident that within each organisation different drivers were directing the move towards creating a growing participatory agenda and engagement experience, there was a positive recognition that there was definite value to be gained, which was not simply limited to the young people themselves, but which also impacted on the organisation.

## **2. Forms and Mechanism of Participation**

Following on from an examination of the rationale, I sought to draw out the various participation forms and the structures that supported the implementation of the particular rationale identified. In the IGS, the principle structure provided was the School Council in which representatives from each year group were

democratically elected by the pupils and provided a forum for discussion and commentary on aspects of school life. Included within this process was the ability to suggest solutions to perceived problems and to influence and make independent decisions. The experience has generated specific outcomes that have witnessed to the value of the School Council both to the staff and pupils – *“They feel that they are getting somewhere in the school. They feel like they can talk to somebody if they have any problems.....they know they have somewhere to go or someone to trust”* (IGS, HC, Head Girl, February 2010). In addition to the School Council, there is also a move towards *“trying to introduce ‘Pupil Voice’, which is sort of giving children the opportunity of feeding back on lessons” .... “I think children are very discerning, more than adults give them credit for at times”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010).

In the LAC/RoC service, the main forums consisted of a variety of focus/rights groups concerning areas of diversity. In addition, a Children’s in Care Council, which *“is a legal requirement now and actually inspected by Ofsted”* (RoC, GJ, Service Manager, February 2010) and Youth Parliament were also available as a means of providing meaningful forums. Notably, there was an example of young people being involved in staff recruitment – *“Probably the most fundamental one was for the Head of Service, which saw four candidates and they went through two interviews with two separate groups of young people and it resulted in a successful recruitment”* (RoC, RT, Participation Officer, 2009).

In the MMYG the forum for participation was centred on three monthly consultation meetings, which formed the basis of a new ‘Action Plan’ for the next

quarter although this remains open to change – *“We let the young people come, so we basically deal with it day to day, because young people, one week, they might say, yes, they want to go to Drayton Manor, but a few weeks later, they might change and say, we want to go to Blackpool, so we always kind of leave it to the last minute, to some extent, because it’s always led by young people, not by us”* (MMGY, MS, Youth Group Leader, February 2010).

It is worth noting that in all of the organisations a formal adult led structure was provided as a means of enabling the young people to engage in the participation process. There was, however, little or no evidence that young people were involved in the establishment of these structures. When considering the selection/election processes utilised, there was recognition of the need for democratic principles to apply, although there was also evidence that these processes were open to manipulation by the organisation to aid the selection of perceived ‘good’ candidates. For example, some adults admitted that they would actively encourage articulate and confident young people to put themselves forward for election. This is, I believe, a dangerous pathway and ought to be avoided since it is at the expense of genuine democratic principles.

### **3. Gains and Obstacles**

Following on from an examination of the mechanisms which structured the participation activities, I looked at identifying the merits and restrictions which had emerged from these processes. Within the IGS the main recognition of gain concerned the individual benefit to the young people themselves – *“I do think the benefits are far reaching, because part of the programme of PSHE is to produce*



*citizens of the future and if you can learn in childhood and at school that you have got a voice and you will be listened to, that you have got responsibility and that you have got some kind of power, then you're going to obviously have a knock on effect later on"* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010).

There was also a perceived disciplinary benefit - *"When they have got ownership of what's going on, they are less likely to be disruptive"* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010). Interestingly, however the Head Girl (18 years) spoke in the present tense about the benefits - *"They feel like they can talk to somebody if they have any problems - "It gives them peace of mind that they know they have somewhere to go or someone to trust"* (IGS, HC, Head Girl, February 2010). That said, there was also a recognition that the school as an organisation had gained - *"Yes, I do think we have gained a lot, you know, because we've gained the idea that we trust them and they can trust us"* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010).

Within the RoC service, their particular focus was centred on good practice principles that enabled active and effective dialogue - *"we need to be clear that we're all here to work for children and young people and we need to be approachable to them"* (RoC, NK, Operations Manager, October 2009). At the same time, there was a firm view that the young people gained significant skills - *"Confidence, self-esteem, I would say, ability to communicate with each other, friendship"* (RoC, NK, Operation Manager, October 2009).

In the MMYG they saw the main gains in relation to maturation issues - *"I feel/*

*they learn a lot about adapting and getting on with the subject or looking at the bigger picture”* (MMYG, FS Volunteer Youth Worker, February 2010).

When examining issues that were perceived to be obstacles the IGS identified problems arising from a lack of adult awareness, skills and belief – *“Trying to break tradition because it's never happened before .....you have to really be careful how you implement change, it has to be gradual”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010); and – *“Their own teaching experience over a long time, this wouldn't have been the thing to do when they first started teaching, so I think they probably haven't moved with the times”* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010). However, there was also the view expressed that identified a barrier resulting from a perceived poorly elected representative – *“the barriers are that perhaps you elect someone who's all talk and doesn't actually consult and we have to look at the process holistically really, don't we?”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior Pastoral Care, February 2010).

Finally, a further barrier was derived from a lack of information – *“it isn't that they haven't got the ability, it's that they haven't got the actual information that's needed....when they're very young, they haven't got the sort of information necessary to make those sorts of decisions”* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010).

The LAC/RoC service also felt that the obstacles were more adult centred – *“I would say communication. How we communicate”* (RoC, DG, Participation Officer, October 2010). In addition, there was a view that adult structures also

could have a negative impact – *“A very, very clear answer to that one and that’s timescale that we have ... the consequence of those timescales is that we’re picking young people for the sake of having young people because that’s what we have been asked to do”* (RoC, RT, Participation Officer, October 2010).

In the MMYG they considered that obstacles relate to issues of equity – *“Young people will need to be treated fairly ... just as you would treat any other adults and what they share is as important as other adults and most importantly, if there is mutual understanding”* (MMYG, MS, Youth Group Leader, February 2010).

#### 4. Hart’s Ladder

The following table sets out each interviewees understanding of where they consider their organisation sits in terms of the participation stages expressed by Hart’s Participation ladder.

Organisation	Role	Hart’s Model Level
IGS	Head of PSHE	Level 4
	Head of Pastoral Care	Level 7
	Head Girl	Level 4
LAC/RoC	Service Manager	Level 6
	Operations Manager	Level 6
	Participation Officer 1	Level 7
	Participation Officer 2	Level 6
	Participation Officer 3	Level 6
MMYG	Youth Group Leader	Level 8
	Volunteer Youth worker	Level 7

**Table 7.36 - Organisation’s Judgements against Hart’s (2002) Participation Ladder**

The general majority view of the adult’s interviewees expressed a belief that their organisation had a high level of participatory practice. None of the adults

indicated that their organisation fell within the ‘non-participation’ levels 1 – 3. In the IGS however, the prevailing view was that the participation of pupils was at a low level in the ‘assigned, but informed’ category 4. This was consistent with the overall views expressed in the interview dialogue. There was no evidence in the MMYG to demonstrate that levels 7 and 8 were being achieved. However, it was clear that there was a desire to be at the higher levels of participation. In the LAC/RoC service there was a high level of consistency in identifying themselves at participation level 6 which relates to the fact that as a service this is predominately adult initiated, with shared decisions with children.

## **5. Improvements/Advancements and Recommendations**

The next line of inquiry sought to identify whether there were areas of engagement that could be improved. Within the IGS, the emphasis was pupil centred, particularly in regard to recognising their rights to contribute – *“Just to respect younger people and in listening to what they have to say, because they have everybody’s best interests at heart”* (IGS, HC, Head Girl, February 2010); and *“for them to have rights. If something comes up at School Council and they voted for it overwhelmingly, then it should be able to happen”* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010). There was also the view that greater involvement could be promoted through new structures such as by introducing ‘pupil voice’ – *“I’m trying to introduce ‘pupil voice’, which is sort of giving children the opportunity of feeding back on lessons”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010).

Finally, there was recognition that additional adult staff training was necessary –

*“we could do with more training ...the staff here are fantastic, but CPD is a foreign language to some of them”* (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010).

In the LAC/RoC service the focus also centred on concern for issues of communication skills and resources – *“to really focus on what children wish for and try and get them to have that”* (RoC, NK, Operations Manager, October 2009); *“I think the children probably want more time with us ....but I also think a recognition of the importance of the work”* (RoC, GJ, Service Manager, October 2009), and *“I would like this Service to have more of a hub.....like a drop in centre and pop in at any time and somebody’s here all the time and ready to listen to them”* (RoC, DG, Participation Officer, October 2010).

In the MMYG their focus was on resources only – *“to build a multi-billion pound youth building... to get more funding”* (MMYG, MS, Youth Leader, February 2010).

### **7.15 Organisational Literature and Operational Delivery**

For the reason of organisational anonymity, examples of the organisational literature is not included. However, I have provided the following descriptions of the detailed documents provided by each organisation, that relates to their stated aims and commitments to participation engagement with children and young people.

#### **7.15.1 LAC/RoC Literature**

The LAC/RoC service provided me with a significant amount of material relating to the information that is given to Looked After Children when they are taken into local authority care. The presentation of the information has been carefully set out and designed, so that it is readily understandable in a user friendly styled A5 sized folder. The information is portrayed in a colourful way and utilises cartoon like characters to help communicate the contents.

The information encourages engagement and participation whilst outlining what a young person can expect from the service. For example, *'we hope that you can help make good decision about your life'*, and *'It's important that you understand what your rights are, and how to get help or extra advice.'* There is also emphasis placed on confirming that members of the LAC/RoC service can expect to *'feel safe'*, *'keep links with important people'*, *'be healthy'*, and *'to get a good education'* with the overall aim being to help young people *'achieve their full potential'*.

Section 9 of the folder specifically deals with children and young peoples rights, which are written over 10 pages. The first division of section 9 outlines what rights young citizens have and are linked to many of the UNCRC 1989 Articles. The information is clearly written in non-jargonistic language and provides useful contact numbers and addresses as well as giving details of the key people to contact. In this section, the written information directs young people to contact an advocate in Children's Rights to seek advice if they feel that their rights are being ignored. The second division provides confirmation of Birmingham City Council's Corporate Parenting Pledge to all LAC and includes the strap-line *'Your Right,*

*Our Promise*'. The third division provides information about the 'CareZone', which relates to having access to an online chat room messaging and email service. The fourth division provides confirmation about the children's rights and engagement services, whilst the fifth and final division provides a question and answer section. The final statement has a colourful bubble, which directs young people to look out for the new Children's Rights Website.

In addition to the A5 folder, I also received two further pamphlets. One on the Rights of Children's Group (ROC), which explains what the group is about, what it aims to achieve, such as *'to make sure you know what your rights are as a looked after person in Birmingham'* and details the different types of groups that can be accessed, for example, the BROC – Black Rights of Children. The other pamphlet outlines details about the children's rights and engagement service and detailed what the service has to offer, what rights mean and how to get advice on rights. It also explains the role of the independent advocate.

The information provided by the LAC/RoC service is extensive and the presentation, which included young people in the design process, shows sensitivity to the needs of the young citizen audience and has clear child friendly language, images and pictures drawn by the young people themselves interspersed throughout. All of which, conveys a strong impression that the organisation values the input of children and young people.

From a review of the informational literature provided by the organisation, there is a clear commitment towards fostering children and young people's active

involvement in its services, and to provide relevant information to support this objective.

### 7.15.2 IGS Literature

The IGS provided a copy of its prospectus, which outlined the schools ethos and approach to helping pupils to achieve *'individual excellence'*. The IGS strap-line states *'preparing for a bright future, a vision based on tradition'*. The information within the prospectus contains details about how the school pursues a policy of *'encouraging pupils to achieve their greatest potential'*, and sets out how it will endeavour to aid pupils to *'cope with the pressures of modern society'* by *'creating a desire for learning in a happy environment'*.

As well as providing information about the school in general, its style includes excellent photographs of smiling happy children and young people at play, and in undertaking various activities in the class room setting as well as in sporting and leisure events. Alongside these images are photographs of the school buildings and the staff team at work.

The written information speaks about building *'confidence and self-esteem'*, in which pupils are *'nurtured'* and *'are encouraged to take on responsibility and to appreciate the value of co-operation'*. In one section, the literature states that citizenship is fostered in a *'wide range of projects'* including in *'local and national charities'*. The document goes on to detail further opportunities for pupils to demonstrate responsibility and participation through the House System and School Council in which the *'quality of education can only be achieved through a*



*committed partnership of students, parents and staff'.*

The overall presentation of the prospectus is very 'slick', accessible and is done in a very professional manner, in a way that will attract parents and potential pupils to consider joining the school as a 3<sup>rd</sup> sector independent organisation.

### **7.15.3 MMYG Literature**

The MMYG leader provided a comprehensive written list, which outlined the pledges and mission statement for the MMYG, which is given to each new member of the youth group when they first register to join.

The document has a strap-line mission statement which reads, '*Building Tomorrow Today*'. Although this is a positive statement, in my view, there is no other statement given in the document to indicate what this statement/strap-line actually means in practical application.

Within the document there are 10 separate statements included to confirm what the members should expect in terms of rights and behaviour. For example, '*to have a safe environment which is accessible*', '*to be supported*', '*to have access to trained, approachable and skilled staff*', '*to have the opportunities to participate in the decisions which affect young people's lives through local, regional, national and international representative structures*', '*to have the right to confidentiality*', '*to have achievements recognised as by right*', '*to have cultural identities recognised and respected*' and '*to have access to a programme which is challenging to help broaden horizons*'.

It is evident from these aims, that the youth group is seeking to address some of the key Articles and universal standards outlined in the UNCRC 1989, such as Articles, 12, 13, 19, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36 and 39. The pledges are clearly written and are non-jargonistic in their use of language, although, apart from the youth group logo, which depicts young males, the information does not have a eye-catching presentational style to it.

#### **7.15.4 Organisational Literature General Commentary**

The organisational information provided by the LAC/RoC case study is very comprehensive and well produced with a strong focus on helping those using the service to understand and be involved in the decisions that affect their lives as individuals in the care system. There are few statements, however, that direct these mechanisms towards the actual organisation itself. It was particularly evident that this form of engagement was not a priority, when at the end of the IGWP the organisation, for reasons of budget limitations, would not support the participants in their desire to continue meeting as a group to further explore this agenda. Despite these desires, there was no means through which this request could be listened to. It should be noted, that all of the young citizens who participated in the IGWP had accessed LAC/RoC for the first time. This is a significant point, as I had in effect provided a 'gate-way' and a means of enabling them to understand their rights as part of the LAC/RoC service, which though supported in principle by the organisation, could not be met by them.

In the IGS, the information provided was mainly aspirational and although it did include specific structures through which it could deliver its aims, it did not relate

specific details about children and young peoples' rights. From my interaction with the case study, it was evident that their commitment to engagement was part of a strong pastoral programme aimed at supporting the individual pupils to help encourage them to take a full part in the life of the school.

During my contact with the school, there was nothing to suggest that all the aspirations contained in the prospectus were not being achieved. Indeed, I felt that the children and young people, out of all three case study organisations, had demonstrated a greater awareness of allowing pupils to understand their rights, which was evident throughout the delivery of IGWP. This was also supported by the way the participants had expressed their views during the IGWP.

In the MMYG, the information provided was essentially aspirational, which whilst being written in a clear manner, did not include any details about what structures would be put in place to deliver these objectives. I was of the view, that many of the statements were taken from other publications, since it was clear, for example, with the statement about providing 'opportunity to participate in the decisions which affect young people's lives through local, regional, national and international representative structures', that there was no evidence or means of actually achieving this pledge. That said, I am aware that the MMYG is a relatively newly established organisation.

## **7.16 Concluding Summary**

In approaching the case study fieldwork, I have sought to draw out and explore further the issues around 'respecting', 'relating' and 'responding' to children and

young people as part of my paradigm shift proposition. At the same time, I have sought to utilise the PAR methodology with continuing innovation to enable the participatory exercises in the IGWP to be a means of being genuinely collaborative. Accordingly, from the outset, I placed an important focus on demonstrating and providing a real form of participation consent, so that there was a definitive choice exercised on the part of the participants (for both children and adults) to engage in the research. This was reinforced by the quality, form and detail contained in the supporting information and induction meetings. In this way, I was able to show that the PAR research methodology was based on a collaborative form of partnership and that it necessarily called for an equal commitment and level of responsibility on the part of the participants.

In addition, the research underscored my ontological belief in the value and potential that young citizens possess for being capable of participating with effectiveness and uniqueness. For example, in Activity 1, a particular emphasis was placed on drawing out the underlying principles associated with rules, rights and responsibilities expressed by the children and young people. This process has, in my view, demonstrated an important aspect of listening to the voice of young citizens in order to appreciate meaning and be able to 'respond' in an appropriate way that 'relates' to their age, understanding and context.

Similarly, Activity 2 further endorsed the pilot study analysis that led me to identify the distinction between an *instructive* and *expressive* form of dialogue, which underpins how parties relate to one another. In addition, the case study research, helped to develop this analysis so as to understand the importance of

extending opportunities for engagement, establishing effective forums and in generating outcome experiences, which create a proactive means of providing effective 'response' to children and young people.

In the final two activities, as well as drawing out the children and young people's experiences of adult interactions, attitudes and behaviours, I also sought to explore their ability to respect, relate and respond to each other within their own evaluation exercises as part of the various competencies investigated.

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, have revealed the way adults view the participation agenda from which it is evident that children and young people are respected. However, from my fieldwork investigations and analysis, I am of the view, that adults are experiencing difficulties in how they relate to young citizens in respect to their age, understanding and context. This was supported by the participants in the IGWP who communicated, through the various activities, that adults often fail to respond in an appropriate way to them, which makes them feel that they have not been listened to.

In the final Chapter, I will seek to draw together the results of the research in order to conclude my analysis of the paradigm shift I have put forward, to comment on further possible areas of study and to set out recommendations for advancing the participatory engagement with children and young people.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“If children are to be supported to develop in this way, they need to be given opportunities to practise the skills they will need to influence the world around them. This will entail adults and other children helping them to make choices, to take risks and to see the consequences for their actions and behaviours” (Trodd & Chivers, 2011, p.120).*

#### 8.1 Introduction

In this final Chapter, I will draw the research policy and literature reviews together with the fieldwork findings, experiences and outcomes in order to critically reflect on the main research question and its subsidiary questions and aims. Secondly, I will argue that these findings suggest the need for a paradigm shift. This will illustrate the contribution that the study makes to the current body of knowledge, as well as to policy implications and practice developments.

The final section will critically present the emerging conceptual implications of the research, outlining my recommendations and provide suggestions on other areas of study that could further this field of investigation.

Crucial to all research conclusions is the specific audience to whom the outcomes and recommendations are addressed. For example, Appendix 5 – Head Teacher’s Report, dealt very specifically with the initial findings emerging from the pilot study and was aimed at promoting the participation agenda within that particular school environment. Within this chapter, however, the arguments are primarily orientated towards the academic audience and to the bodies that are

currently promoting children and young people's participation.

Before addressing the conclusions arising from the research findings, however, it is important to restate the parameters that have defined the boundaries and limits of the research investigation. The central aim of the empirical work was to undertake the Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a case study with groups of children and young people aged 11 to 16 years of age set within a number of public and third sector organisational settings, in order to elicit views, opinions, experiences and feelings through an Interactive Group Work Programme (IGWP) methodology. Thus, the 'case study' is of the IGWP and is an example of a participatory initiative implemented across four organisational 'sites' - collectively this experience of implementation creates the 'case'.

Whilst the research sought to explore the effects of the participatory practices and the levels of engagement that impact on the children's capacity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives, it also aimed to compare these with the children and young people's experiences more widely by including reference to their community and leisure/social contexts. Additional information was gathered directly from the organisations through adult questionnaire surveys, key individuals' semi-structured interviews and the organisations' documented policy objectives and practices.

Ultimately, the research case study was conducted with 94 children and young people undertaking the IGWP across the 4 organisational settings (generating 35 questionnaire returns and 13 semi-structured interviews), which included a balanced, and in my opinion, a 'representative sample' (Bryman, 2008, p.156) in

terms of cultural, economic, ethnic and gender diversities. The underlining ethical principles that guided my research through the planning process, fieldwork, data collection and analysis have been undertaken in compliance with social research practices.

Consequently, the research has established a comprehensive and thorough investigation of the case study location(s) and has generated a significant volume of evidence in a variety of forms that includes quantitative data, qualitative responses and observational narratives. The analytical process has included a 'face validity' (Bryman, 2008) control exercise in order to verify the measures identified. Underpinning the research methodology, analysis and evaluations is an interpretive epistemology that seeks understanding of human action rather than simply identifying the forces that are seen to act on it (Bryman, 2008). In this way, the research has sought to establish reasonable conclusions that are valid and can be generalized with a degree of reliability.

## **8.2 Summary of the Key Policy and Theoretical Drivers**

Fundamental to the policy changes brought about by New Labour's 'Third Way' social democracy was strengthening the relationship between public service organisations and citizens. The drive to do this was aimed at enabling citizens to participate in the structures of civil society (Giddens, 1998), in order to create strong attractive and thriving communities and neighbourhoods. Specifically, the benefits sought concerned greater inclusion, accountability and improved quality of life, which were to be achieved through a focus on generating improvements in service delivery and design. Central to its ideological beliefs was the promotion



of opportunities and ‘empowerment instead of dependency’ (Powell, 1999, p.13).

With the creation of Children’s Trusts at local level, local targets were set out for children and young people’s services. In this way, there was a means of identifying needs and priorities, through collaborative partnership arrangements, to help bring about different types of participatory methods. Moreover, this approach generated initiatives aimed at ensuring that decision-making processes involved closer public influence.

Initially, much of the emphasis of the participatory programmes and policy changes were orientated towards issues around welfare, as can be seen both from the Children Act changes in 2004, which introduced the ‘Every Child Matters’ outcome criteria, and from the later National Curriculum Citizenship’s PSHE programme. Ironically, rather than promoting empowerment this tended towards further considering children and young people as ‘dependants’, viewing them primarily in terms of their ‘future role as an adult citizen’ (Lewis, 2007, pp. 1-24).

In contrast to this Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) emphasised the need for listening to a ‘child’s voice’ maintaining a focus on the benefits derived from the wider inclusion agenda, and concern for how children and young people could be properly empowered as active citizens in society when decisions are being made that affected their lives.

Within the school environment the concept of the voice of the child has re-

emerged within the practical application of 'student voice' (Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011, Fielding, 2011) where pupils are believed to benefit both 'socially and academically' (Fielding, 2008, p. 9) from being listened to more collectively by their peers and adults throughout the teaching and learning process.

Against this policy background the sociology of 'childhood' (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2008, James & James, 2004, James, Jenks & Prout, 2007, James and Prout, 1997) developed as a strong discourse. From this evolving ontological standpoint the 'social competency' (Komulainen, 2007, p.12) of young citizens was recognised, in which the immaturity of children is not trapped by its biological fact of life (Parsons, 1951, Piaget, 1955) but rather is understood and made meaningful as a fact of culture (James and Prout, 1997). This brought new challenges to the theoretical debate that often polarised adult attitudes, questioning the 'conventional wisdom surrounding the child' (James, Jenks & Prout, 2007, p3) and pedagogical practices, which in varying degrees assume that children and young people lack cognitive, emotional and experiential competence.

Within the cultural changes in relation to children and young people that have been taking place in society, many of which paradoxically have sprung from safeguarding issues, children and young people have come to have a greater awareness of their rights. In safeguarding matters, for example, children and young people are now very aware that they have a powerful voice. As a result, 'childhood' as a social and cultural reality is changing rapidly. Within this construct of 'childhood', children and young people are now seen as co-

constructors of the social environment, not only as a social group but as individuals as well (Ulrick Beck, 1992). To an extent, it is possible to consider these changes as in themselves, new drivers demanding ever greater rights of expression on behalf of children and young people. Arguably, this has brought into greater focus the aspects of 'adulthood' (Bell, 2005 and 2009) in which certain attitudes now speak with an unacceptable tone of exclusion, superiority, discrimination and domination (Lee, 2003).

Thus, what began as a neo-liberal political drive to improve the quality of life of children and young people making them self-confident and responsible future citizens, with greater chances of experiencing good service delivery and favourable economic outcomes, benefits have shifted towards a social justice imperative, which recognises the distinctive active contribution that children and young people can make as legitimate and integral 'social actors' (Hill & Tisdall, 1997).

The consequence of these developments has been a growing acceptance of the moral obligation to generate changes in participatory engagement practices. As part of these changes, consultative forms where children and young people are seen as 'dependants' (Lee, 2003), have moved towards forms which are collaborative in nature and function, such as those set out in Hart's Participation Ladder (Hart, 1992) in rungs 4 - 8. The drive to promote these practices has, I believe, been reinforced by the articulation of a new dialogue which helps to unveil the tendency in adult communication that is 'awkward' in knowing how best to relate and respond to children and young people in these processes.

### 8.3 Paradigm shift - 'The Three R's of Awkwardness'

The paradigm shift that I have posited following the completion of the pilot study and main case study investigations has its roots in the issues that were brought out from both the literature and policy reviews and in particular the 'adultism' discourse which Bell (1995) articulates and the concepts presented by Lee (2003, 2005). One of the key spurs for the research stemmed from my interest in and concern about the characteristics of adultism, as caricatured in 'Matilda' by Roald Dahl (1988) in which her parent's attitude towards her as a child, is summed up so effectively in her father's admonishment 'I'm smart, you're dumb, I'm big, you're little, I'm right you're wrong' (Dahl, 1988). In my view, several important dimensions of adults' awkwardness in communicating effectively with children and young people find expression in this form of admonishment. Both the statements 'I'm smart, you're dumb' conveys a general attitude of disrespect to another individual, whilst 'I'm big, you're little' reveals that this disrespect may derive from an inability to relate to someone seen as very different. Finally, 'I'm right, you're wrong' illustrates the tendency, where such inability to communicate exists for one party to respond peremptorily and non-negotiably to the other.

The importance of highlighting the issues associated with respecting children and young people, relating to them and responding appropriately, have emerged from my review of ideas associated with listening, the key themes from the UNCRC (1989) universal articles, the sociology of childhood, the Third Way agenda and corresponding legislative framework and policy initiative programmes, of the New Labour government.

At an early point in my research, I felt that the concepts of adultism derived from a rather extreme view of adult behaviour, that my research has challenged as not representative. This initial suspicion has been supported by the research, which has illustrated that the general approach that adults take to children and young people most of the time - and specifically adults in public and third sector organisations - is not hallmarked by 'adultism'. Adults, for the most part act, I believed at this point, in a benevolent way towards children and young people with the objective of wanting to provide for their best interests, particularly in regard to safeguarding. Accordingly, I perceived a softer, more accommodating perspective in which the apparent occurrence of adultism arises as a result of the adults experiencing a level of *awkwardness*, as I have termed it, in how they relate to children and young people, an awkwardness that comes from a lack of (or loss of) understanding and communication skills which are appropriately attuned to listening to children and young people.

During the pilot study research, the direct work with children and young people drew out and identified some of the factors that make for 'awkwardness', particularly in relation to elements of communication. Activities 1, 2 and 3 each focused on aspects of listening and led to the identification and definition of 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of communication dialogue. They also demonstrated the interpretation skills that support the process of gaining a deeper and fuller understanding of the underlying principles that arise from the dialogue taking place between adults and children and young people. In this way, young citizens' formative experiences in dealing with the 'external' (non-family) adult world are grounded in the existence and expectation of respect,

where possible outcomes are better related to the concern and desires of young citizens, so that the forms of adult responses become a positive and inclusive factor in their experience of dealing with the world. This has led me to coin the phrase the '*Three R's of Awkwardness - Respect, Relate and Respond*'.

Hart's (1992) participation ladder has provided a good framework for understanding the different levels of participatory engagement, however, my evidence leads me to believe that it does not go far enough in dealing with the communication issues and skills that cause the possible 'awkwardness' in adults through their interactive relations with children and young people. The proposed paradigm shift, which I have posited, provides a way of filling the gaps in our understanding which I consider are revealed by the deficiencies in Hart's framework.

## **8.4 Subsidiary Aims and Questions**

As part of constructing an answer to the principle research question in this study, I will firstly set out specific response to each of the subsidiary aims and questions. In doing this, I will only draw from those fieldwork findings which are directly applicable to the specific issues arising from the individual research aims and questions.

### **8.4.1 The benefits of Participation**

**Aim 1:** To explore the benefits, if any, arising from children and young people's participation within the case study settings.

**Question:** “What are the benefits within the case study organisations from children and young people’s participation in decision making processes?”

In the design and development of the research, incorporating PAR and IGWP within a case study strategy, I sought to explore, in a direct way, the benefits (collectively and individually) which the children and young people were gaining from their participation and involvement within the chosen organisational settings. The triangulation methodology adopted allowed for an exploration of the benefits (actual and potential) both to the children and young people and to the participating case study organisations.

As part of the semi-structured adult interview enquiry, I have sought to identify the benefits, if any, derived from each organisation’s perspective, given its particular rationale for promoting participation engagement with the children and young people. The findings of this part of the research, taken together, revealed that the rationale across all four settings is largely in a state of infancy. Whilst there was evidence that the organisations concerned had a genuine belief in the importance of the participation agenda, based on moral imperatives and national standards, implementation was primarily driven by legislative and policy demands, which had not been advanced beyond a relatively basic level and which did not correspond to any expectation of benefits that might be reaped by the organisations concerned.

The lack of advancement from a purely abstract belief to a practical expectation of benefit from commitment to the participation agenda, was most apparent in the

evidence that this agenda was still rather alien to a significant proportion of the adult staff members in my study settings. The belief in potential benefits arising from the participation agenda was strongest in some of the leaders of the organisations concerned. They suggested that the remedy to this problem would require a ‘cultural’ change in thinking – *“until you change the culture, I can’t see that anything would happen or I can’t envisage anything happening to make more participation”* (IGS, KR, Head of PHSE, February 2010).

The failure to advance the rationale for participation as a potential source of benefit to the organisation to a wide range of staff was compounded by a lack of investment in the necessary resources and time allocated to make opportunities available for staff, and young citizens themselves, to receive training, support or mentoring. The lack of sufficient investment, which is always necessary in advancing and promoting new policy objectives, is contrary to the UNCRC (1989) statement that places a duty on resourcing such changes. Equally, the absence of any systematic evaluation processes to monitor or verify the benefits and gains set against clear and specific targets arising from the participation programmes, in my view, also undermine advancement of this participation agenda on a wider front amongst the organisations concerned.

The translation of policy on the need for participation into formulated structures, using pre-defined strategic models, that I found within each organisation was systematic of a nationally directed ‘top-down’ form of implementation. Whilst it is reasonable to expect that implementation might follow this pattern, particularly where it is linked to national inspection standards such as those pursued by



Ofsted, the evidence indicates that this mechanistic approach has had the effect of constraining the dissemination of the participation approach. This is shown by the lack of any substantial documentation within the organisations concerned which would establish and promote the strategic vision in which participation was seen as bringing specific benefits to that organisation. Similarly there was no evidence that the process of implementation had involved the young citizens themselves in any meaningful way.

To an extent, the MMYG, as a leisure-based group which involved a free choice on the part of members as to whether they became involved was an exception. Here there is no evidence of a 'top-down' structure or directive to implement participation. Although the MMYG lacked documentation of its practice of holding a three monthly forum meeting to review the 'Action Plan', it was clear that this practice was nevertheless quite well integrated into the organisation as a whole, and was based on a keen philosophical awareness of the desirability of promoting youth group members participation and giving them a voice, with stress placed on 'listening' and an openness that involves the reciprocal 'modification' that Lewis (2007) particularly advocates. Therefore, the linkage between overall philosophy and practical structure adopted appears to have the strength that is of central importance in advancing the benefits of participation. Consequently, the structures ought to be able to express a tangible and documented vision, which incorporates both inclusivity and transparency within defined co-produced (adults and children and young people's) principles, targets and evaluation methods set within agreed timescales.

It is crucial that these measures for inclusive participation avoid the problems that James and Prout (1997) acknowledge can potentially undermine the relationship between agency (action) and the structures in social life (family and community), which children and young people may see differently. Furthermore, promotional literature and other documentation on participation needs to incorporate a 'children friendly' presentation style and to see 'children friendly' media, in order that the intrinsic value of the children and young people's collaborative involvement is acknowledged and 'recognised' (Lee, 2003).

Notwithstanding the short-comings in the development of the various participatory engagement forums, structures and processes, the evidence has revealed that the progress made in participation activity has generated the following positive outcome benefits (particularly in the form of outcomes) from my findings:

- building self-esteem, appreciation, trust, a sense of being valued and confidence
- advancing social cohesion and inclusion
- increasing knowledge and awareness of children's rights
- improving listening and negotiating skills
- providing a forum for generating and voicing ideas
- developing group participation skills

With the exception of the 'generating and voicing ideas' benefit, the gains are primarily skill-based and reflect the emphasis on citizenship within the National Curriculum and its effectiveness in delivering this agenda.

In the design of the IGWP Activity 2 (Examples and experiences of being listened to) it was aimed to identify the extent of the experiences that the children and young people have had of being able to engage and participate in decisions, both within their organisational settings and in the associated community and leisure/ social settings and the benefits arising from them. From the data provided it was evident that there were few experiences of being able to participate in the organisations' decisions where these related to operational service delivery matters.

In the IGS case study, the data revealed at first sight a high percentage of expressive forms of dialogue within the organisation, and pointed towards benefits resulting from the many examples of the pupils' involvement in decisions. On closer examination, however, these experiences were mainly associated with extra curriculum lunch time activities involving the pupils' free choice to participate. In reality there was, in fact, limited scope for children and young people to contribute to the wider organisations' operational structures. In contrast, within the MMYG there was opportunity for youth members to participate and engage in the review of the Action Plan, which formed part of the organisations' structure. In the LAC/RoC group (IGWP Activity 4) the children and young people themselves expressed a belief that they saw a benefit from their involvement in the organisations' structures, for example, in sitting on recruitment panels for the appointment of staff.

It is evident that some of the ideas around participation have impacted both on the children and young people and on the adults (including the sceptics), for

example, changes to school uniforms and meal menus have been acknowledged as positive contributions arising from participation of children and young people. Nevertheless, there is the danger that these kinds of change, which are in my view peripheral in nature, cannot of themselves, sustain a continuing process. Cruddas (2012) points out that participation must possess the potential to be a force for change. It is essential therefore, I believe, to recognise the importance of promoting and generating material changes and impacts if the benefits of participation are to be realised and sustained into the future. In this way, children and young people themselves can see that they have made a genuine contribution with real substance.

Because of the concern about lack of specific benefits, as expressed by the adult sceptics, peripheral changes may be considered as legitimate ‘quick wins’. Wisby (2010), however, cautions against ‘quick wins’ which can also be more harmful, particularly if they are caricatured and perceived as disingenuous. Within the case study findings the importance of generating positive outcome experiences was particularly identified, along with a number of essential factors, which are crucial to promoting the following participatory benefits:

- providing opportunities within organisational settings
- providing forums for participatory practices
- ensuring that there are positive outcomes derived from the experiences

#### **8.4.2 ‘Instructive’ and ‘Expressive’ Dialogue**

Activity 2, through the PAR fieldwork methodology and subsequent analysis,

further helped to identify and demonstrate the benefits derived from the unique characteristics that children and young people can bring to the participatory table. The emergence of a new definition for describing the distinctions between 'expressive' and 'instructive' dialogue is an important finding that provides a practical vehicle which can feasibly contribute towards developing the wider body of knowledge and practice of participation by children and young people. It might provide, for example, a clearer means of guiding the use of language (both for adults and children and young people), and for facilitating and encouraging active listening through an engagement discourse in which the participants are more open to the possibility of change (Lewis, 2007). This in turn might help inform service delivery to children and young people. In this way, adults and young citizens could through a process of self-critical analysis construct a participatory framework that avoids dominance in 'instructive' forms of communication in favour of 'expressive' forms.

Advancing an awareness of these distinctions will contribute towards achievement of the objectives which seek to empower learning, allow choices to be expressed and develop a greater sense of self respect (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). In support of this view, the findings revealed that the children and young people's greatest experiences of 'expressive' dialogue were in the home environment. This is in accordance with Bellamy's (2002) view that opportunities for self-expression advances from the home, where there is generally a greater level of benevolent empowerment, to the transitional stages from childhood to adulthood. Developing an understanding of the distinction between 'instructive' and 'expressive' communication may, I believe, be one of the 'new competencies'

that Bellamy (2002) points to as being needed in adults, whilst also helping to overcome some of the barriers that can often (outside of the home) impede the ability of the parties to relate to one another in an effective way.

Similarly, this advancement of the benefits to be gained through participation by children and young people may also assist in developing the citizenship skill sets and agenda promoted within the National Curriculum, which Kerr (2003) advocates as an important means of advancing democracy. Furthermore, by increasing the level of consciousness around the impact of 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of communication, it may be possible to reduce the level of 'tokenism' that Hart (1992) describes, which often lies unrecognised within unconscious practices, that are otherwise too focused on achieving goals and outcomes and fail to appreciate the importance of the journey – the active co-production component of participation. This in turn may have the result, of advancing interest in 'public value' (Moore, 1995) derived from a conscious awareness of promoting children and young people's uniqueness as a social resource.

Summarizing the benefits of participatory practice, it is evident that there are some demonstrable gains to both the organisations themselves and to the children and young people. However, the benefits in terms of directly changing actual decisions that affected the lives of children and young people's lives were limited in nature, predominately due to the lack of infrastructure (training, support and mentoring) as well as a limited knowledge base and commitment by some of the adults in advancing the agenda. Set against this reality, the PAR

nevertheless demonstrated within each organisation the importance of the distinction between ‘instructive’ and ‘expressive’ dialogue, and that participatory practice can potentially lead to unique and meaningful outcomes, which shows that children and young people are a valuable resource.

### **Recommendation**

Where organisations desire to advance their current practice, I would therefore recommend that they begin their journey towards engaging with children and young people by properly applying the principle of active listening, with special attention to the distinction between ‘instructive’ and ‘expressive’ dialogue that has emerged as critically important in this research. In this way, participation can become an embedded practice, which children and young people themselves can recognise as a part of an inclusive and respectful culture through their interactions with adults, and thus participation can help to establish a more proactive form of co-production, which could advance the 8<sup>th</sup> rung of Hart’s (1992) Participatory Ladder.

### **8.4.3 Influencing Factors for Participation**

**Aim 2:** To assess the influencing factors which enable children and young people to participate in decision making processes.

**Question:** “How do different organisational and engagement factors influence the extent of the children and young people’s participation in decisions within the different case study settings?”

Fundamentally, the level and degree of adult scepticism about whether there should be greater scope given to children and young people's participation process, particularly within the school organisations (Pilot Study and IGS) became evident as a central engagement factor within each organisation, since it can mask a degree of unwarranted fear. For example, the general feeling that 'control' (on behalf of adults) could be lost, alongside a strongly held view that children and young people lack the responsibility necessary to be given more '*empowerment*' are views compounded by the belief that children and young people are a wholly different group in society. This is further implied by the following statements: "*if you are fair to them, they will be fair to you*" (Staff member from the LAC/RoC group), and "*I don't think they want to be us (adult) really, they want to be themselves, but be the boss*" (IGS, AM, Head of Senior School Pastoral Care, February 2010). Such misgivings and distinctions are illustrative of Foley, Roche and Tucker's (2001) discourse that 'problematizes' children and young people as a social group and represents an attitude that is destructive to respectful participation which aims at a genuine sharing of power.

Set against these negative comments, was however, the understanding that most adults recognise that any advancement of participatory engagement would require from them a change in attitudes and culture. Central to this change would be a need to define more precisely the value that could be achieved for the children and young people, as well as in recognising more fully the outcomes that may benefit the organisation through participatory practice, which gives a platform to hearing the voices of young citizens. From the research evidence there is little real insight and consideration into how this could best be achieved,



so as to make it more productive and meaningful for the young citizens and for the organisations. This limiting perception fails to consider the possibility that the children and young people might lend a positive contribution to further this process. For the most part, the adults felt that the problem lay in the organisational structures, the lack of resources or staff time allocation and not in any autocratic function on their part as individuals or as part of the wider adult group.

Furthermore, whilst it was evident that all the adults interviewed demonstrated an awareness of the importance of respecting and responding to children and young people both individually and as a distinct group, there was less understanding of, or indeed an appreciation for the factors which promote productive relations with children and young people. However, the LAC/RoC group, for example, did understand and recognised the importance of providing detailed information (Lee, 2003) and context in respect to the individual service outcomes so that the child could see how the decision related to them and their needs – *“The decision might be the right decision for the child, the issue is the children don’t understand the process of why the decision’s been made.....if you come from a family that is respectful, that loves you, that wants the best for you, that has aspirations for you, they’ll explain things to you so you understand”* (RoC, GJ, Service Manager, October 2010).

A further example was given of an instance involving an advocacy meeting where *“the young people felt the staff weren’t taking them seriously, they felt there was only two members of staff in the whole team that they could relate to, they felt*

*staff were in their office, shut off from them, they felt the rules weren't child friendly, they weren't based on trust"* (RoC, NK, Operation Manager, October 2010). This latter example provides a good illustration of empowerment demonstrating an aspect of co-construction in their social environment (Beck, 1992). Alongside 'respect' and 'respond' therefore, the issue of relating, as a factor, represents, in my view, a significant part of the overall matrix that is required if effective engagement is to be properly constituted.

#### **8.4.4 Relating in Social Context**

Activity 5 (Things that affect you that you have a view on – 32 images) was designed specifically to explore the issue of 'relating'. Central to its method was to utilise the ideas of the 'Mosaic approach' which Clerk and Moss (2008) espouse to enable a listening dialogue to empower children and young people as 'experts in their own lives' (Clark and Moss, 2008, p.6). From the findings, it was evident that the children and young people were both capable and clear in being able to express their views, knowledge and understanding across a wide and diverse range of social contexts, which Komulainen (2007) calls 'social competence', and is not, in my view, a factor that should inhibit or deter participation. Interestingly, the findings in the children and young people's feedback appear to confirm that they are well connected within their wider communities. This is in contradiction to Barham's (2006) view that young citizens are poorly attached and as a consequence this becomes an obstacle that disconnects them from their local communities.

In Activity 3 (Ten words to describe what it feels like to be listened to and not to

be listened to) it is evident from the contrasting descriptions given in the data that the impact on children and young people when they are and are not listened to is a significant finding from my research. Whilst there may well have been a degree of exaggeration in some of the descriptions, it is nevertheless certain that the feelings expressed are real and based on lived experiences. The effect of these feelings and the situation in which they are experienced tend towards a 'marginalized' (Quortrup, 1994) state.

Quortrup (1994) argues, that actually listening to children and young people's voice is a part of being inclusive, and is supported by their being increasingly treated as individuals having rights to certain goods and services and not just as a collective group. A necessary factor affecting participation therefore is to ensure and understand the distinction that is owed to the realities that place children and young people as individuals within a social context and those that places them as part of the social attachment (Morrison, 2006). Creating effective relations, therefore, with young citizens that distinguishes and respects them both as individuals and as a body within a social group is a key factor affecting participation. Relating to children and young people is closely linked to the factor that subsists in respecting the integral part that children and young people play in society as a whole and in their right and ability to express their views and opinions.

From the IGWP outcomes in Activity 1 (Rules, Rights and Responsibilities) it is evident that the children and young people understood with a certain clarity and consistency the principles upon which it was necessary to establish the required

norms for engaging in participation activities, which might arguably be described as being on an equal par with adults. Their awareness of the issues that reflect equality, inclusion and justice as well as the needs to create a forum, which not only supported individuals but also acknowledged the good of the social group, is evidence of a responsible position and as a key factor in establishing participation frameworks.

Within this context, McLeod (2008, p.177) suggests that a further necessary factor is a need to define responsibilities as part of the context that constitutes the particular participatory framework, so that they are appropriate and clear. Whilst this is, I believe, essential, the question of maturity and even competency here is not confined to the issues of responsibility held within the realm of knowledge and understanding, but rather appears, in this instance, to lie more readily in the aspect of maintaining consistency in the discipline required to operate within the ground rules. In the Pilot Study's Activity 4 (Circle Time) this factor was highlighted in the incident in which the ground rules were disregarded, and demanded a corrective action on my part. In addition, within the design of Activity 8 (Create your own activity, plan, deliver and evaluate) the children and young people were given the opportunity to make affirmative decisions on the way they controlled and executed the activity. Additionally, the young citizens were able to exercise judgement about how they and others performed. In undertaking this activity the children and young people across all the case study settings demonstrated to varying degrees successes in their ability to self-regulate.

An additional factor affecting participation was highlighted in Activity 6 in the Pilot Study (Consent) where the primary concern was to ensure that the ethical aspect

of the research approach facilitated a genuine free choice on the part of the pupils to participate. This choice meant that they (the pupils) could exclude themselves from the collective decision to maintain adherence to the agreed ground rules. Fundamental to this factor was its basis as a rights issue. Necessarily, it was important to ensure that the children and young people were empowered to exercise this right, since it underpinned the principles of equality and respect and complied with research ethical principles.

### **Recommendation**

In drawing together the findings which have focused on the factors that affects participation with children and young people, the research has identified a common theme centred on the issue of 'relating' to young citizens. Central to this factor is firstly the need to ensure that all forms of cynicism on the part of the organisation or the adult participants is removed or reduced to a minimum. A second aspect is to ensure that the children and young people are understood as both individuals in their own right as well as in representing a distinct group, and that this is recognised in the listening dialogue so as to engender their distinctive voice and acknowledge their social competencies, freedom and equal status to deliver with authority and power.

As a principle recommendation of my research findings, therefore, I would advocate a form of organisational 'positive approach' to promote this essential participatory factor with children and young people. Necessarily, this will demand an assessment of attitudes, resources and commitment to the engagement process as a whole.

### 8.4.5 Young Citizens' Perceptions

**Aim 3:** To understand the perceptions that children and young people have about how adults treat them when they are involved in the participation processes.

**Question:** “What are children and young people’s perceptions of how they are treated by adults when involved in participation processes?”

The data analysis and evaluation which emerged from Activity 3 (Ten words to describe what it feels like to be listened to and not listened to by adults) indicates a genuine and enthusiastic desire on the part of children and young people to be involved in participatory engagement. Equally, where there is a failure to engage, the young citizens asserted that it has a genuine disabling and isolating impact. Within the findings there are real instances which reveal the underlying perceptions that children and young people experience, which in my view, supports the reality of ‘adultism’, which Bell (1995) and Lee (2003) articulate.

In Activity 7 (Role Play), which focused on valuing the uniqueness of young citizens, I sought to explore through the use of narrative, creativity and imagination, set within the ideas that are expressed in the ‘Mosaic approach’ (Clarke and Moss, 2008), an understanding of the experience and perceptions that children and young people have in the process of making and contributing to decisions with adults by means of role and assimilation. In many of the scenario illustrations, references to the central role play adult characters communicated and portrayed children and young people’s interactions with adults in a negative way and that their role play dialogue was direct and ‘instructive’ in

manner. The following statements are, in my view, suggestive of a clear awareness of an adult power dynamic:

- *“It’s a pity that adults don’t explain things when we ask them.” (Table 7.19 – ISG Group 1 – Role Play Outline Summary – Appendix 6).*
- *“What’s the world coming to? You can’t travel in peace any more”. A pupil replied, “We can be on here just the same as you”. (Table 7.19 – ISG Group 2 – Role Play Outline Summary – Appendix 6).*
- The youths said that they felt that they were *“criminals, watched by an eagle-eyed shop-keeper”*. (Table 7.20 – MMYG 2 – Role Play Outline Summary.

Whilst these characteristics are not of themselves necessarily proof of ‘adulthood’, there is nevertheless a discernible underlying sense of subordination in the relationship encounter between the youth characters and their adult counterparts, which is expressive of a perceived dominance and superiority. There was also awareness expressed by the young citizens, that recognised themselves as being regarded as a distinct group who needed surveillance, and that this was part of a cultural attitude, which Bell (2009) identifies as a central element of ‘adulthood’.

The findings revealed that the children and young people are aware of the distinctions between these many ‘adulthood’ (Bell, 1995) traits, and indicates, I believe, that these forms of behaviour are a part of their everyday lived experiences and are grounded in the ‘preservation of adults’ superiority as knowers’ (Lee, 2003, p.89). This is often restricted to a ‘one way informing’ (Bovaird and Löffler, 2009, p.283) process of who knows best. In the discussions that followed the role play activities, there was a common view

expressed by the children and young people that adults needed to be ‘re-educated’ (Willow, 2002, p.50) so that they could better relate and accept that young citizens have their own distinct values (Driskell, 2002), which are equally valid at the decision making table.

Throughout the individual activities of the IGWP, all the children and young people in whatever setting were able to articulate a distinct perception about what their role was when working with adults where decisions were made that could affect their lives, for example, in the School Council. The young citizens were also able to identify certain disingenuousness in the adults’ motives in having them participate in decision making forums, for example, in their involvement in the recruitment panels and interpreted this as tokenistic. This perception is identified in Hart’s (1992) Participatory Ladder as level 3 – Non-participation. In contrast, however, children and young people expressed a level of participation within the family home, which was both respectful and responsive in a manner that related to them on a more equal basis.

### **Recommendation**

In seeking to understand children and young people’s perceptions in how adults engage with them, it is necessary that adults develop a greater appreciation, acknowledgment and respect for these perceptions as being material to the participatory practice. In order to help achieve this objective, it is my recommendation that within the decision making participatory processes Hart’s (1992) ‘Non-participatory’ Ladder levels 1 – 3 must be avoided. This is because



children and young people can perceive the tokenistic nature of adults' behaviour. I would further recommend that the participation engagement processes includes an evaluation which examines the children and young people's perception in order to enhance the dialogue and its value.

#### **8.4.6 Abilities and Competencies of Young Citizens**

**Aim 4:** To examine the capabilities that children and young people have to enable them to participate effectively in decision making processes.

**Question:** "What abilities and competencies do children and young people have to enable them to actively participate in the case study settings?"

In Activity 1 (Rules, Rights and Responsibilities) the children and young people were able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the rules needed to function within a participatory framework, which were reflective of the norms within civil society. Notably this awareness was irrespective of their age, gender, race, economic and/or sociological background. Not only did they ascertain specific rules, they also identified issues of collective responsibility involving values that are integral to effective democratic practice, such as a responsibility for freedom, for self-expression, for happiness and for equality, as well as identifying certain rights in terms of non-violence, co-operation and the environment. The conclusions drawn from this exercise confirmed the view that these responses demonstrated maturity and an altruistic character that supported a cohesive approach for collective conduct and behaviour. These abilities in the young citizens reveal their capabilities both individually and collectively. Similarly, the findings in Activity 5 (Things that affect you, which you have a view on – 32

images) revealed that the issues of diversity in their backgrounds had very little impact on the children and young people's ability to understand and express their opinions on the various issues that were illustrated in the images provided, which revealed a deep awareness of contemporary sociological and cultural aspects of life.

In the course of undertaking Activity 7 (Role Play) the children and young people were also able to demonstrate the following awareness, skills and competencies:

- That they have the capability of exercising power and are able to discern and interpret the differences in adults' attitude, values and behaviours
- That they can demonstrate a good capacity to provide a balance between various objectives and draw out key issues
- That they have an ability to negotiate and articulate their views about contemporary concerns and issues in a persuasive way as young citizens, and to contrast these with those of adult citizens, which draws in to question Lee's (2003, p87) view that children and young people live in a 'cocooned innocence' in which information is filtered by adults
- That they were capable of making judgments within the given scenarios in order to ensure that the end results were evident
- That they demonstrated a level of confidence, understanding the task and the constraints which defined the parameters of the role play exercise

- That they understood, through the assimilation of their own experiences, the differences between the forms of dialogue that were ‘instructive’ in nature and tended towards an exclusion outcome, and those that were ‘expressive’ in nature and tended towards an inclusion outcome

The development and definition of the ten key skill sets outlined in Activity 8, Chapter 7 which emerged from the findings, captured the competencies that children and young people bring to the participation table. Whilst the evidence showed that not all of these skills were always fully expressed all of the time, nevertheless, taken together they represent a significant array of competencies, particularly in the two categories which were demonstrated by all groups and involved the application of ‘sound reflective objectivity’ and ‘creativity’.

In pioneering the practice of ‘pupil voice’ in the late 1940’s, Alex Broom (Fielding, 2005) asserted his belief that children and young people had the competencies needed to share in the responsibility for the quality and consistency of the participatory dialogue undertaken and in forming the practical consequences and outcomes that emerged. In describing this reality, he says that there is a ‘principled integrity’ in this right to share and a ‘dynamic vitality’ that comes from this relationship (Fielding, 2005). Within this vitality, young citizens can aid learning by contributing to the process of problem solving within a collaborative engagement framework, which Fielding (2011) calls ‘democratic fellowship’.

In implementing Activity 8, I sought to create a platform, within the PAR framework methodology, that invested in the children and young people a level of empowerment that was, as far as possible unrestricted, so that they could

execute leadership as fully as possible, which is a key element of the participatory process. According to Alderson (2008), power can be viewed for example, as a 'positive energy, rather than a negative force' (p.187). The PAR methodology was effective in enabling the participants to embrace ownership of the activity and the responsibility that derived from it. As a result, I concluded that the notion that children and young people are in some form 'incomplete' (Lee, 2003, p.9) and in some way incapable of fully exercising the competencies necessary to engage in participatory practice in making decisions, is not supported by the evidence.

In the evaluation component of this activity, the participants demonstrated, in the main, a high level of sound reflective objectivity with appropriate and beneficial comments to support their judgements. They were clearly capable of differentiating between the personalities within the group, the behavioural norms, and the requirement to perform the task creatively.

### **Recommendation**

The findings show, I believe, that the issue at hand is not therefore confined to the competencies of children and young people's ability to engage in participatory practice, but rather one of engagement opportunities. If participatory engagement with young citizens is to be advanced, I would recommend and advocate for an increase in the opportunities provided and for adults to recognise and appreciate the level of competencies and abilities that children and young people can bring to the table.

## 8.5 Main Research Question

In responding to each of the subsidiary aims and questions, I have drawn upon the key findings of the study. This analysis in turn informs my response to the main research question:

**“How effectively do public and third sector organisations encourage and engage with children and young people to participate in the decision making processes affecting their lives?”**

Primarily this question centres on the issue of the ‘effectiveness’ in relation to how the participating case study public and third sector organisations have implemented their engagement with the children and young people. In answering this question of effectiveness, I have concluded from the findings that there are the following connected components:

- **Rationale** – The findings across all four participating case study organisational settings generally revealed a lack of clarity, direction, ownership and commitment towards developing a rationale capable of advancing participation into the future and beyond its current level (which I have characterised as ‘infancy’). Notwithstanding a commonly held belief in a moral imperative for participation based on equality and inclusion, even where there was a fearful or sceptical stance held by some of the adults, the children and young people had not been part of the structural arrangements that were created to enable the engagement processes.
- **Structure** – In each of the organisations the various structures established to create the engagement forums echoed the weaknesses of the particular

rationale, which invariably reflected mainly the statutory national standards and specific policy drivers. Whilst the various structures had enabled participation dialogue to begin, with arguably the exception of the MMYG, these systems were not well integrated into the overall organisations' operational mechanisms.

- **Resources** – Organisational allocation of resources (staff time, training and support for children and young people) were poorly considered and generally insufficient to address the goals and objectives.
- **Controls** – Whilst electoral systems were provided for the appointment of children and young people (School Council representatives) these were open to manipulation by the adults, were not transparent and fuelled suspicions of the tokenistic nature of control systems designed to meet the needs of the adults and not the young citizens. Similarly, there were no provisions for the right to review on an annual (or otherwise) basis, the participatory boundaries, procedures, budgets, representatives and avenues of influence. With the exception of the LAC/RoC organisation, the literature provided to publicise the engagement action was constrained within organisational policy driven language and was not 'children friendly'.
- **Organisational culture** – Opportunities to influence strategic policies were severely limited by issues of indifference and in misplaced 'adultism' type fears and concepts, although some of these were linked to issues of safeguarding and child protection.
- **Achievements** – As a consequence of the various engagement practices the evidence showed that the main achievements were orientated towards

the development of the young citizens' agenda as adults for the future. Achievements in generating changes to the organisational functions with decisions that affected children and young people's lives directly were limited. Where young citizens were able to influence decisions which did affect them and the organisation, although they were characteristic of quick-wins, they were nevertheless effective and important to the children and young people and held a lasting impact. In addition, involvement in making these decisions provided the opportunity and platform in which the children and young people could develop their problem solving and negotiation skills.

- **Unique contribution** - There was little evidence within the findings of an awareness of the benefits that might come from utilising the unique contribution that young citizens can make or have to offer. The concept of advancing a relationship with children and young people based on their rights as co-producers was often lost and misinterpreted.
- **Distinction** – The findings revealed that there was a failure by most adults in recognising the distinctive nature of childhood and the many voices of children and young people both as individuals and as a collective group.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate, I believe, the adults' difficulties in conceptualising the issues relating to what constitutes participatory practice with children and young people. The findings show that current practice is often caught between participation that is located in the individual judicial rights of children and young people (as related to the UNCRC, 1989 and the Children Acts 1989 and 2004) and the duties and obligations derived from policy initiatives

stemming from Central Government, which sees children and young people more in terms of a group viewed as future adult citizens. Whilst, I recognise that the young citizens have at times expressed criticism of adults, due mainly to the 'instructive' nature of their communication, this is often a 'blinkered' reaction, I believe, to adults' pre-occupation with their particular organisation's duties and responsibilities. Equally, it was evident that children and young people, whilst having sufficient maturity to understand the issue of rights, did not always appreciate that adults within organisational frameworks had a duty to them, not just as individuals, but also as a collective group. In response to these tensions, the adults, I felt, steered a benevolent course in their attempt to reconcile these two positions within their organisational context. Conversely, the children and young people did not necessarily appreciate that the adults were so constrained and acting in a benevolent way.

**Recommendation**

Consequently, alongside the recommendations made in respect of each of the subsidiary research aims and questions, I would further recommend that in order to progress this participatory agenda the issues of 'effectiveness' has to be understood. Through a deeper appreciation of the interconnected nature of the various components outlined above it is important that adults actively seek to communicate in new ways, recognising through the distinctions of 'instructive' and 'expressive' dialogue that children and young people can be empowered to become co-producers in the decisions that affect their lives.



## 8.6 Further Research Development

In considering additional areas of research to expand the analysis and further test the conclusions that I have developed, I would advocate the following additional investigation studies:

1. To explore the existence and influence of participatory thresholds for children and young people under the age of 10 so as to identify at what age their unique contribution becomes evident
2. To explore and further test the children and young people's defined key skills and competencies, which I have constructed through my analysis of the IGWP Activity 8
3. To explore the mechanics within organisations which foster good participatory practice and which are deemed to be successful in respecting, responding and relating to children and young people.
4. Finally, it would also be beneficial to look more specifically at the adults' perspective and to take account of their participatory skill base, to assess further what are the important elements for active participatory mechanisms within their organisational context. In this way, it would be essential to critically explore the ways in which 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of communication and dialogue are manifested.

## 8.7 Progressing the Participatory Agenda

The unique nature of my research has sprung from a firm belief that children and young people are an essential and valuable resource in their own right as young citizens. Consequently, the IGWP was developed to engage and empower

children and young people as co-producers and leaders. This design was open in helping to facilitate, through its interactive form, the unique and original contribution that young citizens can make. As a result, the IGWP generated a new insight in understanding participatory dialogue, which distinguishes the characteristic of 'instructive' and 'expressive' forms of communication. In doing so it is able to unmask some of the awkwardness that come from subtleties in perceived 'adultism' type actions in which adults believe they are engaging whereas in reality they are acting in an 'instructive' and often therefore oppressive manner.

The continuing transformation in understanding childhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in considering how this should affect society is a key driver in the development of British social policy and practice. The importance of these studies has become increasingly acute, not least because of the growing recognition that many children and young people today are increasingly becoming disengaged, disinterested and disenfranchised in elements of civil society, as was poignantly brought into focus during the UK riots in the summer of 2011. As result, the current Prime Minister, David Cameron, has spoken about there being a 'broken society' (Travis & Stretton, 2011, the Guardian) resulting from a 'slow motion of moral collapse'.

At its centre, the participatory rights agenda springs from the important principle of consolidating democratisation and is concerned with advancing the integration of participation action at every level in society. The involvement of young citizens in this advancement, acknowledges that 'children are not the people of tomorrow, but are people of today. They have a right to be taken seriously and to be treated

with tenderness and respect' (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010, p.xx). My research findings has reinforced the importance of 'respect' and extended it to include the interconnected facets of 'responding' and 'relating'.

Whilst, the issues associated with children and young people's age, maturity and evolving capacities is likely to be a continuous factor in the participatory agenda, in my research, I have added weight, I believe, to the belief that young citizens (aged 11 – 16) do possess the capacity and the competencies that can create effective and worthwhile participatory engagement.

I am firmly of the view that the rate of change and impact brought about by new and developing information communication technologies during the last two decades, has had a significant influence on children and young people's awareness of the world around them and their place within it, not least because they can now interface with it more directly and independently, which was evidenced by use of social media during the UK 2011 riots. In recognising the 'voice' of children and young people as a rapidly growing potential, the current political thinking is to look beyond New Labour's 'Third Way' agenda which focused on improvement in service delivery and quality, towards a more altruistic perspective in which participation is founded on aspects of the common good. Whilst political stimulus is essential in helping to forge new developments in children and young people's participatory practices, there is nevertheless, a parallel need to advance their social identity as young citizens who are capable of influencing decisions with a unique and compelling voice as children who are key stakeholders in the wider society.

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